



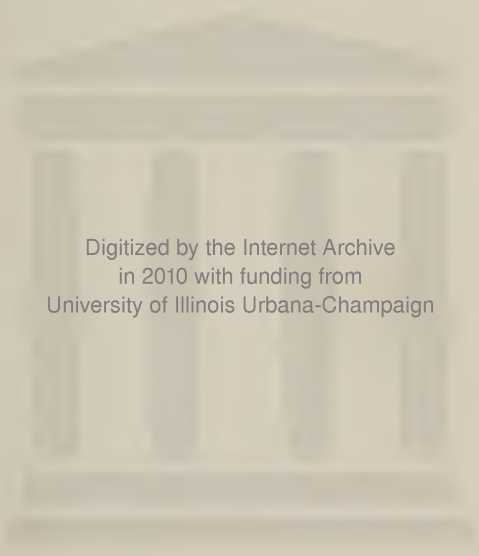
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ALICIA DE LACY;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

VOL. III.

ALICIA DE LACY;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE LOYALISTS," &c.

Wisdom in sable garb array'd,
Immers'd in rapturous thought profound,
And Melancholy, silent maid,
With leaden eye that loves the ground,
Still on thy solemn steps attend:
Warm Charity, the general friend,
With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.

Graty's Ode to Adversity.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ALICIA DE LACY.

CHAPTER XXII.

In gay hostility, and barbarous pride,
With half mankind embattled at his side,
Great Xerxes comes to seize the certain prey,
And starves exhausted regions in his way ;
Attendant flattery counts his myriads o'er ;
Till counted myriads soothe his pride no more, —
The insulted sea with humbler thought he gains ;
A single ship to speed his flight remains.

JOHNSON.

THOUGH King Edward would willingly have loitered away the summer-months at Newcastle, wasting in idle shews his time, his treasures, and his reputation ; necessity now compelled him to accompany his brave nephew, Gilbert de Clare, and lead his troops into Scot-

land. The unwieldy multitude marched hastily through Northumberland, whose ruined villages and barren fields bore mournful testimony to the miseries of the provinces which lie between powerful but hostile nations. Every English heart throbbed with indignation, and every tongue threatened retribution on Scotland, with whose fat beeves and fair dames they promised to solace themselves for their present privations. But on passing the Tweed, the same scene of desolation continued ; nothing was left for food or forage, no trace of inhabitation but the fortified castle or the sacred monastery ; the former too well protected by nature or art to yield to a sudden assault, or of too little importance to detain a numerous host, whom necessity obliged to press on to some spot, where they might find subsistence ; and the latter, if not protected

by its sanctity, was of no value from its poverty.

“Has silence the same meaning in Scotland as submission?” inquired the King, who had now advanced beyond Dunbar without receiving the supplicatory embassy he had long expected from Bruce, to offer him a tribute which he could consume upon his diversions, and for which he was willing to grant that hero his permission to wear a vassal crown. Gloucester pointed to the beacons which blazed on every eminence; directed the royal ear to the sound of the alarm bells, and the eye to a yet more formidable sign of steady resistance; the numerous horsemen, who hung upon their rear. Bold, hardy, and well inured to war, the Scottish knight or baron claimed no distinction over his followers, either in personal indulgence, or military equipment; unincumbered with baggage, except their arms, a metal plate, and a

bag of oatmeal, their horses seemed to partake of the temperament of their riders ; and after sustaining the fatigue of a twenty-four hours march, were dismissed at night to browse among the heath, while the trooper, if the barren district afforded no animal that he might slaughter and devour, baked his oat-cake on a turf fire, allayed his thirst at the next brook, and lay down in his armour to snatch a short slumber, interrupted by habitual attention to every sound.

Such were the bands which preceded and followed the English army : by the former, all supplies were removed ; by the latter, every straggler was cut off. King Edward's cavalry were not fleet enough to pursue them, and they had orders to avoid an engagement.

Stirling castle was the only remnant of Edward the First's conquests, which still appertained to the crown of England. It was now about a year since Edward Bruce

sat down before it, but his siege was rather a blockade than an assault, on account of the governor, Sir Philip Mowbray, having signed a capitulation, promising to surrender if his Sovereign did not relieve him within a twelvemonth. That term was now nearly expired ; and the garrison were so sorely pressed by famine, that Mowbray sent to request the King would not waste his time before Edinburgh, but hasten on to his succour.

On the banks of the brook Bannock, was fought one of the most memorable actions in English history. There King Robert had drawn up his army ; small, but well appointed, admirably trained, and united by a generous attachment to their leader, and a sense of their national independence. The night previous to the engagement, Bruce assembled his bands, and with them performed the rite of confession, attended with its most impressive solemnities. On the next morning, pre-

vious to military array, the bishops and priests, as soldiers of Heaven, ushered in the dawn by celebrating the blessed victory obtained over sin and death ; the abbot of Aberdeen said mass for the whole army ; and the sacrament was administered to every individual ; after which, the troops were conveniently arranged to hear the King's exhortation. " Most valiant friends and countrymen," said the noble Bruce ; " ye see what need we have this day to fight against our enemies, to deliver our afflicted nation from the cruel tyranny of those whose hopes of success are founded on our death, and the utter destruction of Scotland. They are come with their wives and children, as if this nation were a barren uninhabited country, or they only considered us as feeble persons fit for nothing but their pastime, as they have invented tortures which would be to us insufferable disgrace, as well

as misery. Therefore let us appeal to the great God who knows the justice of our cause, and to him who suffered on the cross for us ; and let us pray to them to send us victory, which, if we firmly depend on their favour, we need not doubt will follow our good and honest endeavours. Be not ye discouraged, my friends, at the number of the enemy ; for they are not resolute men, who come to fight for honour and glory, but are for the most part vicious people, who, by their extravagant lives, have ruined their estates in their own countries, and come now to prey upon ours, — being encouraged by the vain promises of King Edward, who does not imagine that we are ready to lose our lives in defence of our country, rather than submit to his tyranny and cruelty. Let us then not be afraid of their vast but actually feeble multitude, but trust to the Divine assistance, that we shall not

only save our lives and liberties, but also gain honour and riches by our valour."

The situation of the Scottish army was admirably chosen ; behind them lay a wild rocky district, to which, if defeated, they could retreat : a mountain, or rather inaccessible precipice, secured one of their flanks ; and the other was guarded by a morass, large enough to ingulph King Edward's army. To increase their own security, and strike terror into the English, even at the outset, they had dug a deep ditch in front of their main body, lined with sharp stakes, and covered with hurdles and turf ; into which, as was expected, the English horse fell at their first charge, and rose no more. Perhaps Robert would have dispensed with some of these precautions, had he known the exact state of the array that opposed him ; exhausted by a long march ; enfeebled by the diminution of that portion of food and rest, which to them habit

rendered necessary ; disappointed of their expected spoil, and hope of easy conquest ; the leaders disunited, and cherishing the same suspicions and contempt for their King, which they had endeavoured to repress in the minds of their followers ; the bands of Hereford, Lancaster, and Warwick, so particularly ill-disposed, that but few of them could be brought into action, and many of the feudatory troops undisciplined and ignorant of arms ; their numbers, as Bruce justly observed, increased their weakness, and the panic which seized them on the disaster of the cavalry, paralyzed all their future operations.

Historians agree in giving King Edward the praise of personal courage in this battle. When he marshalled his army, he addressed them in a speech, wherein he excited their exertions by the hopes of glory, and the large possessions he would bestow upon their valour ; whereas,

if they did not fight valiantly, but suffered the Scots to overpower them, they would not only forfeit these advantages, but must be overwhelmed with shame and ignominy. The different dispositions of the armies and of their commanders may be gathered from these addresses. Vain and sanguine, like all those debauched children of indolence, who think, when they are once roused to action, all difficulties are instantly subdued, Edward, as he advanced with his archers, saw the Scottish army fall upon their knees to recommend themselves to God, while the abbot of Aberdeen advanced in front, elevating a crucifix for his banner. Prepossessed with the long-indulged expectation of their ultimate submission, his native clemency made him turn to order his commanders to spare the supposed suppliants ; but he turned to witness the destruction of his horse, and to hear the shriek of consternation from his own army.

The cavalry were estimated at twenty thousand ; those who disengaged themselves from the covered trenches, while broken and confused, were received by the Lowland infantry on their sharp spears ; and when, by a third attempt to charge, this line was partially broken, the English cuirassiers found themselves on ground stuck full of sharp spikes of iron ; behind which the Scotch again rallied, formed, and completed their destruction.

While this passed in the centre, Edward Bruce, with his Highlanders, charged and routed the English archers ; and thus the chief dependences of Edward were at the same time broken and defeated. The mass which formed the main army, who were to have poured upon the Lowland bands, when the cavalry had thrown them into confusion, has been already described. Such troops may be stimulated to attack ; they can never be made to rally : as they fled, the Scotch advanced, and soon came

to the rear-guard; where, to increase the appearance of numbers, the drivers of the carriages, and the women who followed the army, had disposed themselves in ranks, and displayed banners to terrify their foes,—a weak device, which only led to redoubled cruelty, and indiscriminate slaughter. Fifty thousand English, say the Scottish historians, were this day slain or taken. Seven hundred knights, the flower of national chivalry, lay dead on the field; and among that number, the young Earl of Gloucester, the idol of the nation, grandson by his mother Joan of Acre to the illustrious Edward, and by his father to Richard de Clare, who, in the barons' wars alone, defended himself against twelve enemies; and when his horse was killed under him, pitched one of his opponents by his leg out of the saddle, vaulted into his seat, and continued the fight till he was rescued by his friends. Amiable, as well as brave, this

noble scion of an heroic stock, on the alarm being given that the horse were overthrown, rushed into the battle without his distinguishing mail, and fell among the heaps of his slaughtered countrymen, sorely lamented even by his enemies, who wished to have saved the hero they revered.

The prisoners brought into the Scottish camp out-numbered their conquerors : the most illustrious of these was the Earl of Hereford, who, faithfully defending his royal brother-in-law in the hour of extremest danger, atoned, by his personal fidelity, for the defection of his troops. Edward reluctantly left the field, penetrated alike with shame and grief : of all his late numerous host, he could not collect enough to form a guard to protect his person ; only fifteen noblemen accompanied him to Dunbar, whither he fled, pursued by Sir James Douglass, who could have

taken him and his escort prisoner, but from the smallness of their number, believing them to be only common fugitives, he suffered them to escape. At Dunbar, the Earl of March, pitying his distressed condition, supplied him with a small boat, and sent him by sea to England.

Thus, like another Xerxes for extravagant hopes and singular misfortunes, he reached York in personal safety, after enriching Scotland with the gaudy spoils with which, instead of provisions and military stores, he had encumbered his army, the bravest of whom took possession of her soil for their graves. At York, he collected the fugitives, who might still have been deemed a formidable body, if efficiency depended upon numbers. But the military spirit of the English was entirely broken; and the Scottish historians affirm, that, during the remainder of this disastrous reign, ten of their hardy

warriors were enough to put one hundred English to flight; and a people so renowned and terrible in the time of their late monarch, became a taunting proverb of reproach, stigmatized for luxury and effeminacy, as a nation of buffoons and triflers, feeble in council, feebler in the field, vain and improvident, cowardly and irreligious. *

In the battle of Bannock-bourn, the courage and conduct of King Robert were equally conspicuous. As he rode through his ranks, he was personally assailed by an English spear-man, whom he struck dead. The splendid triumph which he there achieved, afforded an opportunity for displaying virtues of an higher order. The ransom of

* At this time was made the celebrated distich,—

Long beards thriftless;

Painted hoods witless;

Gay coats graceless,

Make England heartless.

the numerous prisoners, and the spoil of the English, he bestowed upon his warriors, only reserving the rich embroidery and gold and silver stuffs for altar cloth, and other sacerdotal decorations. His own reward consisted not in pecuniary treasures: beside the riches of immortal fame, and his people's most ardent love, he received from England, in exchange for the Earl of Hereford, his beloved consort Isabella, who had been detained there a prisoner for nine years, during which he was painfully struggling for the emancipation of Scotland. How richly, at last, was his generous sacrifice of the dearest private ties to public good rewarded, on thus purchasing the liberty of her he best loved, by completing the salvation of his country, and solacing her long sufferings by the acquirement of an independent crown. It is further recorded of this heroic character, that the only trait of personal exultation which he discovered, was the par-

donable tyranny of compelling a monk, whom he found among the prisoners, to describe the victory in Latin verse, though he had been brought into Scotland by King Edward to narrate his triumphs. Happy would it have been for England, had his desire of national retaliation been as temperate as his vanity ; but his country had deeply suffered in the contest with the first Edward, and his pursuit of the second was marked by the bloodiest spirit of revenge. He seized the four most northern counties, and wasted Yorkshire to the walls of its capital, burning the towns, and taking the castles. The strong hold of Berwick was, the English say, surrendered by treachery ; if so, Bruce disdained the traitor he had corrupted, for he hung the governor at the gates of the castle, — an action happily irreconcilable with our improved conceptions of an hero ; but our predecessors must be judged of by the habits of their own age,

and not by the standard of a more enlightened era.

While Bruce thus enriched Scotland with the spoils of England, the latter country became the victim of other sore visitations of Providence. Scarcity increased into a famine, and famine was followed by pestilence. For three years, the crops had been so alarmingly deficient, that provisions not only exceeded the ability of the poorer classes to purchase, but were inaccessible even to the rich. The facts stated by the antient chronicles chill humanity. They speak of neglected prisoners feeding on each other ; of parents hiding their infants, lest they should be devoured ; of hundreds dying for want of food ; and thousands perishing of disease, engendered by eating the putrid carcasses of animals ; or vegetable substances, improper for nutrition. The King was touched with a lively sense of the miseries of his people : he called a

parliament, and pathetically recommended their distresses to legislative consideration. But the disaster was beyond human remedy; and the statutes which were passed to regulate the price of provisions having been found to increase the evil they were meant to obviate, were, in the following sessions, repealed; and the only unrescinded effort of parliamentary interference, was a law, making it a capital felony to make any kind of liquor from grain, in order that the whole produce of the earth might be converted to bread alone. It is painful to relate an instance of the King's weakness, which to us appears like wanton waste and cruel mockery, yet marks his indelible affection, and might probably be considered by him as an offering of expiatory piety, to avert the judgments with which England was visited, for what seemed in his estimation the foulest of crimes. He chose this season to remove the body of Gaves-

ton from its obscure grave, and to reinter it, with a profusion of expence, in a royal sepulture. He invited the principal spiritual and temporal lords to assist at the ceremony ; but, either deeming the procession impious, or disdaining the service, or again intending to prove their determined resistance to that system of favouritism which this action shewed the new advisers of the King meant to encourage, they considered the invitation as an insult, and the summons was generally disobeyed. *

* This chapter is almost closely historical.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Nor peace nor ease the heart can know,
 Which, like the needle true,
 Turns at the touch of joy or woe,
 But, turning, trembles too.

GREVILLE.

AMID these horrors, the Countess of Lancaster reposed in luxurious security at Canford castle. She had been reserved from sharing the fate of those ladies who followed the army which invaded Scotland, by the machinations of Surrey, who, in forwarding his own designs, secured her safety. Her zest for military glory was entirely lost ; and her alarm at being circumscribed in her actions, by the guard of strangers placed over her by the King, was so extreme, that she readily acceded to a plan propounded through the agency of Beatrice, to put on a hood and surplice, and in the disguise of a chorister pass through the gates of Newcastle,

with the funeral of Beauchamp, whose corpse was permitted to be removed for interment at Warwick. The departure of this sad procession a little preceded that of the numerous host, who went to give their bodies to the rapid Forth, or to strew the Cheviot hills with their war-worn forms. With other prospects the combatants departed ; but Alicia left Newcastle, moralizing on the contrasted splendor of her entrance, and the mournful cast of her present occupation and attire and listening to the solemn strains of her companions, as they shouted the following dirge :—

- “ Prepare,” great Warwick proudly cried,
- “ A rosy chaplet for my bride ;
- “ And bind around my sunny hair
- “ The laurel-garland conquerors wear.
- “ With choral songs of triumph gay,
- “ Ye minstrels, mix my nuptial lay ;
- “ And from the battlements of Guy
- “ Bid all the festal streamers fly.”

But bring no bridal chaplets now,
 Nor laurels for the victor's brow ;
 And let the master minstrel's hand
 A strain of deepest woe command.
 Hang ye on Guy's proud battlement
 The broken lance, and banner rent ;
 While bells in solemn cadence toll,
 " Pray for the peace of Warwick's soul."

Now, for the nuptial pall unmeet,
 We wrap thee in the winding-sheet ;
 And on thy faded relics place
 The rosary and signs of grace.
 Instead of honour's guerdon bright,
 The torches for thy bier we light ;
 And clad in sable housings lead
 In solemn pace thy warlike steed.

Oh, much belov'd, much mourn'd, farewell !
 Whene'er our saddest tales we dwell —
 On glory's radiant visions shrouded,
 On love's bright lamp by darkness clouded,
 On beauty withering in the tomb,
 On virtue blasted in its bloom —
 For thy soul's rest our beads we'll tell,
 Oh, much belov'd, much mourn'd, farewell !

The affectionate heart of Alicia was restored, by the deep impression of this scene, to a right tone of feeling. She

wept for the gallant companion of her youth, cut off in the morning of his days and the spring-tide of his hopes, and for the yet more pitiable situation of his destined partner, who, concealed in a close litter, followed the remains of her plighted lord, alternately regretting that "grief did not kill," and lifting her eyes to heaven, with a prayer for that resignation which her meek dejection seemed to indicate she had already obtained.

With these feelings the Countess of Lancaster blended apprehensions for the safety of her son, who had been stolen from her quarters, while she went to console Matilda immediately after Warwick's death. She indeed guessed (as was the case) that fear and affection had inspired old Mabel with the spirit of enterprize, who, being too much unacquainted with courts to approve their manners, and (as is generally the habit of the vulgar) prone to credit every tale which throws reproach

on her superiors, implicitly believed the report that Warwick was poisoned, and concluded that all of his party would share his fate. She remembered the freedom with which she had spoken her sentiments, and doubted not that every censure she had uttered had been repeated to the King, whose enmity would make her the next sacrifice; and after herself, she supposed the heir of the house of Lancaster would be eminently obnoxious. At the moment that her lady, on departing with the Earl of Hereford, put the child into her arms, she formed a project for its security. A trusty horse-boy saddled the roan hobby. She wrapped the young Sir Edmund in his mantle, drew her riding-hood over him, mounted, and passed the gates without molestation, though not without a strong inclination to stop and reprove the insolence of the porter, who, as he let her through, uttered a jest indicative of the King's opi-

nion of the uselessness of old women. She was repaid, however, for this extraordinary suppression of loquacity by the gratification of talking to the child during her journey; to the free use of this cordial specific may be attributed her having strength to travel to Pontefract, with short intervals of rest and refreshment, till she sheltered herself and her precious charge within its walls.

The funeral procession stopped as soon as it reached the high ground overlooking the fords of the Tyne; the priests suspended the dirge, while they blessed the English army, whose many-coloured banners they distinctly perceived winding across the naked moors on their way to Scotland. Here the Countess, judging herself safe from pursuit, had determined to re-assume her own character, and devote her most assiduous attention to the consolation of Matilda, who, she resolved, should be her constant com-

panion till the Earl of Lancaster's return. But the service which Surrey had rendered her, was not of that disinterested nature to allow her the society of one who would soon counteract the influence of his emissaries. Though compelled himself to follow the King's banner, he had taken care that the lady, whom his contrivance rescued from peril and fatigue, should still be surrounded by those who would fill her ear with his praises, and banish from her mind such reflections as would repel his hopes. Sir Hilary and Beatrice were in waiting at this spot with a fleet palfrey, which, they intreated, she would instantly mount, and proceed with them through bye-paths towards Pontefract, where they encouraged her to hope, from the testimony of the horse-boy, she would find her son, and where alone she would be safe from the pursuit which the King would cause to be made, when, on mustering his retinue, he found himself

deprived of an hostage, on whose preservation depended the fidelity of the bands of Lancaster. To the objected unkindness of leaving Matilda in her first sorrows, it was answered that, as the widowed maiden would doubtless choose a monastic life, the walls of Amesbury would be her best shelter, and its holy vows her most appropriate comforters. Impatience to behold her darling boy precipitated Alicia's decision ; and the obvious necessity of consulting her own safety, by avoiding all unnecessary disclosures, influenced her to desert the procession without taking leave of her mourning friend.

At first Surrey had determined to convey his intended victim to his own castle ; but, though this would more speedily have secured possession of her person, his design upon her possessions would be frustrated by such precipitation. All hope of success depended upon her making him the object of her preference, and he had

already so far succeeded as to change disgust into endurance, pity and gratitude. His agents were, therefore, instructed to proceed with caution, to dwell on his praises and on her obligations to his friendship, and to induce her to consider him in the light of an honourable, generous protector. In this capacity he hoped to be invited to her castle; where opportunities might be afforded, which he would so improve, that, for the sake of her reputation, if not from affection, she might be compelled to plead her pre-contract, and sue for a divorce from Lancaster. The King's favour to him, and fixed enmity to the murderer of Gaveston, added to his own influence at the papal court, left no obstacles to his views but the inclinations of the lady.

To Pontefract, therefore, the Countess of Lancaster was conveyed, where she found and embraced her son, thanked and rewarded Mabel, and sent an offer-

ing of gold and jewels to the shrine of St. John of Beverley, the patron-saint of the Earl of Surrey. Thus having in her own estimation discharged the obligations of maternal affection, gratitude and piety, she was easily seduced to return to that course of indolent dissipation, the insufficiency of which to supply the nobler wants of the immortal mind she had oft-times experienced, acknowledged and deplored. The cabal formed by an intentional adulterer sedulously employed themselves to keep her mind in that state which prepares it to become the victim of temptation. Still some untoward circumstance ever intervened to abate the zest of the present revel, and it was their part to suggest reasons why the next would attain the very acme of delight. Leicester and Holland, her appointed advisers, were far distant; and her lord's admonitions driven from her recollection by a succession of more immediate cares.

But this career of promised pleasure was speedily interrupted by two alarming causes,—the derangement of her own finances, and the approach of the victorious Scots. It was proposed to remedy the former by more rigorous exactions of those supplies of provisions with which the feudal tenantry discharged their obligations to their lord: the general condition of the kingdom now rendered this payment impossible, except by tearing from the wretched husbandman that hard-earned bread which was to sustain his ability to labour. Alicia shrunk from every act of inhumanity ; but, accustomed as she was to attend only to those whom interest made oppressors, she was persuaded to believe, that while satiety and listlessness were the punishments of the great, unremitting exertion and scanty support were, to the humbler children of Adam, happiness.

As Pontefract was too near the seat of war to be a safe residence; and as busy rumour aggravated the numbers, ferocity, and licentiousness of the enemy, Alicia was easily persuaded to remove her household to Canford castle, which, standing in the south of England, must (they observed) be one of the last places the Scots could conquer. To have fortified her castle, armed her vassals, and determined to defend their lives and her own, would have been performing the part of a Blanche of Navarre; but Alicia's mind was now too enervated for the imitation of virtue. During their journey towards Canford, she recollected that they would pass near the nunnery of Amesbury, whose hallowed walls now sheltered her mother's age, and her young friend Matilda's sorrows. Would not a visit to these noble recluses be dutiful and kind? But she had so long allowed herself to give way to any

suggestion which gratified her self-indulgence, that she was again easily persuaded to believe that the austere Lady Margaret would consider it sinful to allow herself the indulgence of embracing her daughter ; and that to Matilda, the sight of her would be a renewal of her tears. To herself the visit must confessedly be painful, and surely she could not wish to revive in those who had renounced the world, any recollections that would counteract the oblivious calm they must desire to feel. There was an infectious gloom, too, about the walls of a convent, improper for those who had to contend with the arduous difficulties of an eminent station. The gentle spirits of her dear lady (Beatrice observed) wanted bracing stimulants at this calamitous period ; it was better, therefore, for her to defer the visit which, it was admitted, she should some time pay her mother, till she had attained more forti-

tude ; till public affairs looked more cheerful ; till the Lady Margaret expressed a desire to see her ; to be ingenuous, till every excuse was exhausted ; or till old age or sickness arrived, which in ancient times generally made the most dissipated, “ dying, put on the weeds of Dominick.” Yielding to these reasons, Alicia took a distant view of the edifice, where, during the time of the Saxon monarchs, the royal penitent Elfrida sought, by her liberality, her prayers, and her tears, to expiate the crime of ambition, and called upon the earth which she consecrated to the maintenance of holy votresses to hide the stain of her step-son’s blood. Alicia and her maidens joined in reprobating this foul transaction, and having told their beads for her soul, and for all other benefactors to the richly-endowed pile, she felt that she had discharged her duty to its present inhabitants, and was at leisure to listen to the

reported calamities of many ladies who had accompanied the English army, and had no gallant lovers to facilitate their escape after the fight of Bannock-bourn. Some had been carried off by Highland chiefs, and left on bare rocks among the stormy Hebrides, because they would not submit to their lawless desires ; others were still wandering among the Cheviot hills, or starved to death in the deserted cottages of Northumberland. Many had been burnt in their own castles, because they would not surrender them to these savages. From a participation in these horrors, Beatrice observed, her lady had been rescued by the brave, wise, disinterested Surrey. It was a great consolation to know that this flower of nobility survived the wreck of that fatal battle. After having performed prodigies of valour, and with his single arm defeated one wing of Bruce's army, he brought off his own troops all safe, and

was now employed in putting Sandal castle and its dependencies in such a state of defence, that not a Scot durst fire one of his towns, or attempt to drive his cattle.

Alicia acknowledged that she owed much to Lord Surrey, and would devise some princely way to shew her gratitude; a deep sigh followed: what did that sigh imply?—for it inspired Sir Hilary and Beatrice with guilty hopes. “The wind,” said the Countess, “sits fair from Spain: it will surely bring me some news from my Lord.”

The Bishop of Exeter was one of those true patriots, of whom the christian church has had frequent occasion to boast. In the hour of distress he abode with his flock, travelling to every part of his diocese, endeavouring to alleviate calamity, and setting the example of patience and provident frugality. He was now arrived at Wimborn-minster, to

inspect a distribution of food from the granaries, which he had there established, and to minister medicines to the indigent, among whom the pestilence was raging with fearful violence, when he was informed that a pilgrim, who was worshipping at the shrine of St. Cuthberg, implored his benediction. The Bishop hastened to the penitent, and embraced and blessed the Earl of Lancaster. The unexpected return of the man whom his esteem and affection selected as the only one who could arrest the tide of national calamities, drew from him, in the first instant of surprize, a joyous exclamation; but, like the “ false colours of the watery bow,” the hues of joy soon dissolved in copious tears. “ Holy father,” said Lancaster, “ you give me a weeping welcome; but I will not enquire the cause; I know the distress and humiliation of England: a premonitory vision has hastened my return, to serve and

save my country, if possible ; if not, with her to suffer and fall."

When religious impressions are so intimately interwoven with the habits of the times as to give a colouring to every event, miraculous warnings and supernatural appearances are believed to be so frequent, that, instead of staggering credibility, they hardly excite surprize. Modern scepticism, combined with scientific discovery and philosophical deductions, denies the reality of these alledged instances of Divine interposition ; yet, as we have reason to believe that, though some of these cases were fraudulent attempts to accomplish sinister designs, in the majority the impression was real,—might not the effect on the soul of the devout believer, who conceived himself admitted to the secrets of heaven, be salutary, though the supposed prodigy was neither wonderful nor prophetic.

The delusion which operated on the mind of the Earl resulted from the vapourous phenomena of a mountainous region, from his own acute sensibilities and gloomy forebodings, and from a long course of ascetic mortification and contemplative devotion, which had elevated his imagination, till his soul seemed ready to burst from its attenuated mansion, and to receive its ideas rather from intuition than through the medium of the senses. The account which he gave to the Bishop was, that, after his campaign in Valencia, he repaired to Montserrat, with other pilgrims ; here he submitted to the customary probation of spending many weeks in severe abstinence and constant devotion, before he was deemed worthy to proceed with the holy troop to the shrine at Loretto. While he waited the departure of the galley, which was fitting out at Barcelona for that purpose, on the night of the

nativity of the Baptist, (the date of the fight of Bannock-bourn,) while praying on the summit of one of the projecting rocks which stand piled on each other in that mountainous region, he saw among the clouds two hosts of aërial warriors, marshalled and ranged in long lines across the sky. He could discern their banners—the crosses of Saint Andrew and Saint George; and those known national weapons, the bow and the broadsword. Suddenly the army which displayed the insignia of England vanished from the cope of heaven; a sanguine stream flowed along the sky, which was succeeded by waving fires, predictive of blood and desolation. A veiled spectre then stood by his side, arrayed in the habiliments of death. The figure was mournful, indistinct, and silent; but he knew it to be his friend Warwick, and his fate therefore needed not be told. The shadowy form melted into air; again he looked

upon the heavens ; the triumphant host disappeared ; but the figure of a knight in shining armour supplied its place, and expanded till its lineaments covered a space vast as that occupied by the constellation of Orion. He appeared like one charged with important tidings, and he urged on his aërial courser so rapidly, that in an instant he rushed down the northern hemisphere.

The Bishop admitted that Warwick was dead, but related no particulars : he detailed the successive calamities which more than realized Lancaster's sad forebodings. For a time the anguish of the patriot absorbed the affection of the father and the husband. He had just enquired how far his own family were involved in the general misery, when he perceived one of his lady's pages among the crowd advancing to accost the Bishop. Domestic feelings then agonized his soul ; his limbs trembled ; while, to conceal his

emotion, he drew his hood over his face, that he might hear an undisguised account of his wife and his son. Were they well?—had the destroying angel which laid waste the land, sheathed the sword as he passed over his dwelling; or was the youth come to solicit spiritual assistance to a dying penitent?

He listened with breathless impatience to the first words which the page uttered: they were a prayer for an indulgence, allowing his lady to make an abbot of misrule to preside at an entertainment which she was preparing to amuse the Earl of Surrey and other noble guests, for whom she was going to keep the feast of St. Michael, with such extraordinary magnificence as to make a master of the revels absolutely necessary: he had also another favour to request, which was, that a portion of grain might be allowed her out of the Bishop's stores; and as a pledge for repayment, she

offered to impawn the family jewels. He affirmed the distress of the household was extreme, though, to diminish the consumption, the dole to beggars at the gates was withheld, and the school and the hospital were warned not to expect further rations.

The Earl's indignation was of too stern a cast to break out in exclamations against this incorrigible levity. Every word uttered by the page impressed on his memory the conviction of his consort's disobedience, extravagance, indiscretion, and inhumanity. Which should he most condemn;—goading the famished poor to desperation by an unseasonable display of luxurious waste; or sending the indigent objects, whom she had removed from their houses and taught to depend on her for support, back to extremest misery, in a state of tenfold destitution; or inviting Surrey to her castle in the

absence of her lord? The dissolute Surrey!—the accused murderer of infant innocence!—he whose unhallowed vows virgin decorum made her once reject! Were these the fruits of unrestricted confidence and generous indulgence?—this the example which she exhibited to her contemporaries, and her emulation of the matrons renowned in English annals?—this the society to which she purposed to introduce his son? The Bishop marked the Earl's perturbation; and left the page, to enquire how he should word his reply. “Advise her,” said Lancaster, “to be correct in her preparations, for a banquet is often visited by an unexpected guest.”

With the conciliatory spirit which became the minister of the gospel of peace, the Bishop tried to extenuate the faults of indiscretion, and of flattered beauty corrupted by prosperity. He argued that the notoriety of this assign-

nation was a presumption in favour of its innocence. The guilty gallant always stole in secret to his wanton's bower ; the honourable knight publicly visited the illustrious dame, of whose friendship he boasted. " Wise and pious prince," continued he, " remember your recent sufferings from the indulgence of intemperate passion. The church has just removed your suspension from your civil duties : go, then, and resume your station in the state and in your family. Reform what is amiss ; but do it with temper and discretion. Deal gently with your erring spouse ; and, by appearing to forget her past misconduct, prevent her future backslidings. Henceforth I trust you will be suffered to remain the steady guide and daily observer of her conduct. We expect not stability from the vine, but sweetness ; and if we remove its support, and break down its fence, shall we

wonder at the beast of prey devouring its prostrate tendrils?"

"Father," returned the Earl, "if but one roving thought ventured to question the purity of my wife, I would not stand here, a weeping wittol, but with decisive firmness abjure at once my sorrows and my shames. The justification may be spared, where no doubt is entertained. But surely it is enough, that the penitent who left England, bowed down with the burden of his own transgressions, should find on his return, that the woman whom his choice fixed on, or rather the specious beauty, who disputed his idolatrous heart with his Maker, that she, instead of propitiating justice in his behalf, and hastening his return by her alms-deeds and prayers, has kept carnival in his absence, making a league with ruinous prodigality and measureless indiscretion. The harp of the minstrel, and

the heel of the dancer, echo through my castles ; but the unfed poor wail at the gate, and the porter deals out blows instead of largesses ; nay, worse, even the selected pensioners she promised to support, are driven shivering from their unprovided cloisters, to supplicate a precarious meal from the already over-burdened monasteries, or to increase the number of wretches such as I have hitherto met, whose gaunt bodies and hollow eyes, downcast from despair, seem to consider the earth, not as a generous nourisher, but only as one vast grave. How unlike are the objects by which you are now surrounded !—oh ! how unlike the happy peasantry whose strength shewed satiety, while their visages looked content ! How different, too, from yon gay minion, whose crisped locks and scented mantle speak the soft sybarite, not the son of a British banneret, trained in his baron's castle to acquire fair pre-eminence in arts

and arms. 'Tis well for thee, Sir Fopling, that I am now unarmed, or this sanctuary would scarce protect thy insulting luxury."

The Bishop crossed himself, and adjured the Earl not to despoil the grace of his newly-attained reconciliation with the holy church, by forfeiting his scarcely-confirmed absolution of the seven deadly sins; only two were in strictness carnal, and men fell into the others often through inordinate self-esteem of their own spiritual attainments. "You have," said he, "for your soul's good, of late principally conversed with valiant crusaders and mortified anchorites, from whose manners those of a princely lady's domestics must be widely dissimilar. My conscience and my habits alike require me to use plainness of speech.—In correcting the faults of your consort, remember your own. If unbounded indulgence has begot levity, be not rigid or hasty in straitening the cords of restraint,

lest you should break the spirit, whose supports you have contributed to undermine. I will advise the lady Alicia to prepare for your return ; and may your mildness in shewing her wherein she has been to blame, and her ingenuousness in anticipating your censures, render you henceforth as conspicuous for your conjugal felicity as your piety and prompt obedience to those holy watchers who are the guides of your soul."

As the Earl of Lancaster's superstitious zeal impelled him to pay his devotions at the shrine of St. Cuthberg, (the selected patroness of the lands and castle of Canford,) before he presumed to enter its precincts ; so the obligations of chivalry required some testimony of grateful recollection from a knight safely returned from combating infidels, to the memory of a King who had fallen in battle against the pagan Danes, and lay buried in Wimborn minster. On the tomb of Ethelred,

brother to Alfred the Great, Lancaster laid a warrior's offering, namely, the broken sabre and jewelled turban of a Moorish vizier, whom he had slain on the banks of the Ebro ; the former as an appropriate ornament ; the latter, to maintain masses for the monarch's soul, provided it was not yet redeemed from purgatory. But as since St. Vincent, who some hundred years before was permitted to take a view of those dolorous regions, in order that he might describe them to unbelievers, no account had reached the holy see of the number of spirits who were there confined, the canons of Wimbourn proposed, that, in the event of the King's liberation, the church might have the privilege of appropriating his donation to the benefit of any other sufferers, whose situation required their prayers, and craved to be considered as their proper representatives.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ O how insatiable is the god of this world! he devours our time, yet hides eternity from our eyes.”

SOUTHGATE'S SERMONS.

WITH a mind firmly braced against female blandishments, yet with a temper changed from stern indignation to solemn displeasure, by the mild dissuasives of the Bishop, and the soothing influence of devout exercises, the Earl of Lancaster wrapped his cloak around him, grasped his pilgrim-staff, crossed the river Stow, and demanded admittance into his castle. At the sound of his well-known voice, the warder's trumpet announced the joyful news; the portcullis was raised; and the princely lord entered in this lowly habit, while from every tower the inhabitants rushed to pay

him their homage, and congratulate him on his return. Nor was his consort last; for though his prompt appearance frustrated a project which she had formed for a stately pageant and a magnificent entry, nature spoke to her heart when the warder gave the signal, and suggested a reception infinitely more grateful than the curvettings of caparisoned steeds, or the elocution of hired orators. Seizing her young son, who was sporting by her side, she flew with him in her arms along the corridor, with breathless haste, and met the monarch of her heart with expressions more soul-subduing than the most artful rhetorician could utter:—"Welcome! a thousand times welcome, ever dear and most honoured master!"

The Earl's resentment was as firmly fixed as a man's could be who had not forgot to love. All the way from the minster, he mused on the incompetence

of an unaffianced churchman to determine what the honour of an injured husband required, and could only bring himself to pity the infirmity he could not cordially pardon. Yet when Alicia with one white arm encircled his neck, while the other grasped his child, the churchman did not seem too lenient in his apologies for the lapses of a sex so fragile, yet so attractive. Young Edmund had now attained that age, when unfolding reason makes childhood super-eminently engaging ; his tongue pronounced the word father ; and at his mother's direction he raised his petitioning hands, imploring his blessing. Never did that mother appear so lovely. What were the adventitious embellishments of beauty, — a coronet of jewels ; or the sweeping pomp of a velvet mantle, stiff with embroidery, and cumbrous with its facings of ermine, — to the lovely disarray of her exuberant tresses, falling from the wimple with

which they were negligently tied ; or the unembellished modesty of that apparel, which neither disguised nor exposed the symmetry of her form ? Lancaster gazed on her countenance, till he determined whatever offences inconsiderateness might have led her to commit, she might plead guiltless at the bar of love, and folded her to his heart with an affection equal to her own, and almost with equal transport.

All was well while the Earl confined his conversation to a detail of his own adventures since their separation ; and Alicia could not offend while she spoke of the improvements of their darling child ; but when the glow of rapture incident to their first meeting had subsided, the contrarieties of their dispositions again appeared. When the repast was served, the Countess saw with surprise, that the rich suits in which she had attired herself and her ladies, to welcome

her husband's return, formed a marked contrast to the sober brown cloaks, and unadorned doublets, in which the Earl and his train were habited; and she heard him say at their entrance, — “ Even this is in honour of my lady; but henceforth we must adopt our colour to the state of England, and appear as mourners.” The damsels shuddered at these words, which sounded to them as the knell of their jollity, and even Alicia's smiles became less playful. Yet determined to persevere in her attentions, she recommended to her lord a dish which her cook had lately invented, exquisite in its flavour, and nutritious in its quality, being a concoction of the richest animal juices mixed with cordial wines, and flavoured with almonds and spices. One spoonful supplied the place of an ordinary meal; yet the weakest stomach would not pall at its digestion. — “ I am glad of it,” returned the Earl, as he gave the untasted mess to the sewer,

bidding him divide it equally among the famished wretches who lay under the walls of the castle. After eating sparingly of the plainest food, he called for the gold cup, and ordering it to be filled with the richest malmsey, he invited all who were present to pledge him: "We drink it," said he, "to the health of our infant son; it is also a farewell to luxury; to-morrow every superfluity must be cast aside, till Heaven restores the blessing of plenty to this afflicted nation."

Dreadful sounds! Alicia's delicate attendants looked mournfully after the sewer who bore away their favourite regale, while choaking vexation made them incapable of tasting the proffered cup. The Earl continued to converse with his Countess in a style solemn but affectionate.

"I see," said he, "many places at my table empty. Where are the gallant knights and esquires who used to occupy them? The brave Giles de Argenton,

who led on my harquebussiers?" Alicia answered,—“ He was killed at Bannockbourn.” “ Unfortunate,” replied the Earl ; “ his silver locks, then, went down to the grave stained with blood ;—but he ever prayed for a soldier’s death. Where is Walter Devereux, whom I made a banneret the day we drove Douglas from the walls of Carlisle?” —“ Prisoner to Bruce,” was the answer. He proceeded to inquire after others, but the reply had only those two variations. “ You support their wives and children, as was your purpose,” said Lancaster ; “ to-morrow we will visit them, and see what further con-
lations their afflictions admit.” The Countess blushed, and replied it was her intention to do so, but at present her thoughts had been too much occupied to execute her design.

“ True,” returned Lancaster ; “ your grief for the gallant Beauchamp, the companion and friend of your childhood, must

have engrossed your soul. Yet tell me, how does the gentle Matilda, that irreproachable, but ever-suffering maid, sustain her loss? Doubtless she has been your principal care; yet those who fought and fell under our banner, ought not to have been forgotten."

Alicia was sorely distressed; and not knowing how to reply, gave a sign to her maidens, and retired with them to her chamber. Here, while she drew Beatrice apart, and held her in anxious conversation, the rest made various but unfavourable remarks on their lord's behaviour. "Does the Holy Virgin," inquired Dorcas, "send back all her worshippers in this humour? If so, no husband of mine shall ever go on a pilgrimage. I thought the Earl would have returned as gay and airy as I do after I have confessed to Sir Hilary, and have brought a costly present for my lady, and some curiosities for us all, to shew he had been in foreign parts." —

“ He has brought our lady a present,” replied Sybil ; — “ a bone, forsooth, of St. Catherine of Sienna ; and the sweet creature took it so graciously ; but, had I been her, I would have had the turban stuck full of precious stones, which he has laid on old King Ethelred’s monument, even if the head of the grim Soldan were sticking in it, and let the canons of Wimborn have had the bone to do what they pleased with.” — “ He looks as if he had changed heads with the grim Soldan himself,” said another ; “ did ever Christian creature see how he eat his dinner, sparely and gravely, as if it were a sin to be joyous ; and how he sent that dainty pottage off the table as he would a mouldy gallimaufry !” — “ For shame, girls,” exclaimed Mabel ; “ who taught you to talk thus of your betters ? Know you not His Highness, our good lord and master, is just come from a country where the infidels carbonade and eat their enemies ;

so, like a good Christian knight, he is afraid of touching any but plain diet: and as for the relic you wicked flirts scoff at, 'tis doubtless an amulet to keep us from the plague, or a treasure that will make us the joyful mothers of lovely children."

During this discussion, Alicia and Beatrice, apart in the oriel, were debating on the difficulties annexed to the proposed gala, and to the visit of Lord Surrey, whom, the Countess confessed, in her lord's present humour she durst not receive. Beatrice was loud in complaints and expostulations; declaring, if it were her husband who came home in such a moody humour, she would keep no terms with him. "You are not only too beautiful and too good, dear lady," said she, "but too kind and too gentle. I would have made him from the first both love and fear me." — "I trust he loves me," answered Alicia, sighing; "and surely

so brave and so wise a man could never be induced to fear a woman !” — “ I have seen lovers,” continued Beatrice, “ as valiant and accomplished as he, who have gazed on your face, as if they could have fallen down before you. But if the Lord Lancaster ever did love you, you have been so over-placid and observant of his humours, that he is become quite indifferent, and thinks any treatment good enough for one who never will resent ill-usage.”

The allusions of Beatrice would have reminded Alicia of the fixed stare of Surrey’s eyes, and the alarm and distress his glances had often given her, had not her attendant broached an idea infinitely more painful, by seeming to doubt if Lancaster ever loved her. Was it pity or affection, she inquired, which induced him to renounce his intended vow of celibacy, and accept (she must confess) the proffered hand of a rich enamoured heiress. Till

now, she never suspected that he wanted affection, though his tempered passion was subordinate to the influence of conscience and duty. The paladins and troubadours of romance and poetry founded their celebrity on the beauty of their mistresses; and the world had to thank the smile of some fair paragon who made them heroes, through the hopes and fears of love, for all their heroic achievements. But the great men of true history did not sacrifice the world for a woman's smile, except a few for some worthless courtesan, for which they acquired the title of madmen. She would have thought an idolatrous subservience to her charms a desirable addition to the virtues and reputation of Lancaster, but had long endeavoured to satisfy herself that this was not to be expected from his character. The idea of his viewing her with indifference was, however, insupportable: yet, was there not some cause for this fear? Though in-

dulgent and placable, her faults never eluded his observation : he noticed them not with passion, but with a gravity which shewed he expected reformation ; and if there appeared in this, superior wisdom ; surely, also, there was little love.

Beatrice interrupted her lady's musings by hinting, that there was a way by which she might discover the state of her husband's affections, and his jealousy would be this criterion. " By St. Cuthberg," said she, " I would insist on having what company I pleased at my own castle, especially the Lord Surrey ; allow him some innocent freedoms ; and try if you can by these means rouse the Lord Lancaster out of this melancholy crabbed humour. It will be a kind action to him, and most charitable to us all ; for never did I see a family so changed during the short time he has been at Canford. Every soul is grave, or stupid, or busy ; no mirth, no wit, no junkets ; even Sir Hilary walks

with a missal under his arm ; and, if we ask him if the interlude is finished, he rolls his eyes, and says he is composing a sermon to preach before the Earl on the martyrdom of St. Cyprian, and studies upon which of the saint's acts he shall enlarge, that he may give direction to the painter for proper devices to be displayed from the pulpit."

Alicia's long-indulged irresolution tempted her to suspend her own intentions of preventing her expected guest, and to ponder on the advantages of Beatrice's project. To this there were two objections ; as her husband's return must be the suspected cause of the prohibition, it would either cast reproach on herself for conscious impropriety, or on him for prohibiting an innocent engagement. Again, that love of power with which the sex is reproached, made her feel a wicked and dangerous curiosity to know if the firm hero and contemplative saint could

be alarmed by artifice, or roused by coquetry. In a fatal hour she yielded to the plan of Beatrice ; but with this saving clause, that, as her sole design was to divert her husband's saturnine humour, Lord Surrey must be assured that she received him only as a friend. Her heart, her life, were all devoted to Lancaster. Never, even in thought, would she swerve from the chaste duty she had vowed at the altar ; and, indeed, that was her chief stimulant in the part she was going to act ; for surely her lord must be wretched under the pressure of this stern misanthropy.

Thus Alicia embraced a project pregnant with ruin ; deceived by a sophistry her understanding would quickly have detected, had it not been blinded by her insatiable love of amusement, and dread of sober consideration. Had she gratified the former at proper seasons only, and made the latter her daily practice, occa-

sional visits to the house of mourning, must have excited thankfulness, and heightened, by contrast, the zest of pleasure. Consideration would also have taught her the difference between the jealous honour of a husband, and the self-debasing uncertainty of a lover. The former, conscious of his rights, cannot be appeased when once irritated; the latter, aspiring to favour, permits past anxieties to be forgotten whenever a sunny smile renews his hopes. In one case, woman is a shepherdess, sporting with the lamb she has bound with flowers; in the other, an Indian devotee, rousing a sleeping tyger to devour her.

With the exception of those who had sold themselves to the furtherance of the most nefarious design; the household of the Countess were like herself, wayward from indulgence, and hard-hearted, from never having known real affliction. It was no part of their creed, that public

calamities ought so far to affect those who were rich and prosperous, as to interrupt the career of pleasure, or abate the zest of enjoyment. They were indeed heartily sorry for the famine, and the pestilence, and the war ; and so they said, as often as these stern visitations were alluded to : but unless they had lost a lover or a friend, or apprehended that the sickness which swept the country had seized some inhabitant of the castle, they never imagined any thing more was required of them than a passing sigh, or a “ Heaven bless you,” to any very pitiable object. Sometimes they pacified themselves with thinking that the rumours of general distress must be aggravated : one would remark that use would reconcile the common people to their sufferings ; and all agreed, that since they had done nothing to bring on these misfortunes, it was of no avail to make themselves unhappy at what they could not help. The most

affectionate remarked, that if grave looks grew contagious, their dear lady would be made uncomfortable. A roundelay was then chaunted, to drive off melancholy ; and one party started to blind-man's buff, whilst others invented anagrams. Alicia, thus accustomed to the habit of excluding whatever was painful, and supposing herself the centre to which every event must refer, was at once piqued by pride, and stimulated by affection to withdraw the attention of her lord from all other objects, even if it were by a dangerous stratagem.

Some few days Lancaster passed at Canford, which he employed in reforming the luxurious habits of his family, and relieving the misery of his neighbours. High mass was celebrated every morning ; and a banner displaying the bloody cross, inscribed with the petition customary in times of infectious sickness, was hoisted on the standard tower, at

once to awaken the fears and the gratitude of the inhabitants. When the drawbridge was lowered, it was not to send forth the prancing steed and the joyous huntsman, but to give egress to the good Earl, accompanied by his almoner and physician, going his daily round among the sick and destitute. Every unnecessary indulgence was banished, and each temperate meal was prefaced by a long and solemn acknowledgment of undeserved mercies ; mixed with intercessory prayers, that, till those who were ready to perish could be relieved of their bodily wants, they might be sustained by a larger portion of spiritual comforts. Instead of riddles and jests, loud laughs and sportive frolicks, the Earl called on his household to devise how the means of subsistence could be most providently husbanded, or what sacrifices every individual was willing to make of his own comforts to the necessities of

others. Most ungallant and ungracious was his behaviour to his lady's fair myrmidons ; for he talked of women gaining celebrity by skill in medicine, or by personally attending in hospitals ; while others might shew their taste in needle-work by making garments for the helpless, and by so occupying their time in works of piety, as to have no leisure for vain decorations.

Alicia received hints, that she was expected to accompany Lancaster in his eleemosynary visits, but she was fearful her health would suffer from entering cold damp hovels. According to the new plan laid down by Beatrice, various symptoms of insurrection appeared in the hitherto gentle though wayward wife. She stated that it would be impossible rigidly to conform to this austere system. Her confessor had laid a stress on her giving due honour to all the holy festivals, and the approaching one of St. Michael must be a day of cheerfulness and enjoyment.

“ Most willingly ;” answered Lancaster, “ the last pipe of ale shall be broached, and the best of my remaining beeves slaughtered to gladden the hearts of the indigent with one day of full fare and absence from sorrow.” “ I purpose also,” said Alicia, with a stately air, “ to extend our hospitality to the noble, the eminent and the polite, to whom the beechen bowl and maple dish of the hermit cannot be introduced; nor must they be scared from our table by the chaunt of litanies, or made melancholy by the display of deaths’ heads and cross-bones. Among other noble visitors, I expect the Earl of Surrey.” She fixed her eyes on Lancaster’s face as she spoke; but he, discovering no change of countenance, gravely asked, if he was a meet guest at the table of De Lacy’s daughter. “ Is he not,” said she, “ a valiant knight and a true subject?” — “ Granted,” returned the Earl, “ but must not a lady’s guest bring further credentials.” They

both stood for some time silent; when the Earl proceeded, — “Whoever enters my gates must conform to my household laws. I proscribe luxury, I restrain levity, I enforce supplicatory devotion. When the scythe of destruction mows down our fellow-mortals in heaps around us, can we hope to escape its edge, unless we fall prostrate under the shade of the holy banner that now waves over our citadel.”

The Countess argued that religion did not enforce us to make ourselves wretched, merely because it was not in our power to make others happy. Cheerfulness, she asserted, was the offering of gratitude; and to enjoy the bounty of Providence, was obedience. She would have proceeded, but the Earl sternly interrupted her, saying she was an unsound sophist, and misconstrued his feelings, by calling seriousness misery. “Did England,” said he, “flourish like a parterre of sweet and

gaudy flowers, yielding the incense of delight, and reflecting the gay hues of many-coloured Iris, I would walk forth in this paradise of sweets, and surrender my soul to sober joy. But we are now inhabitants of a lazar-house; to us the infection has not yet spread; we are associated with condemned criminals, though on us sentence hath not yet been passed. Should our tabors resound to the toll of passing-bells; shall we con our jest-books among new-made graves, and sport with the emblems of mortality? Oh, wife, I am not miserable, while with the fully-exerted strength of every faculty I walk steadfastly in the path my conscience prescribes. I am only wretched when some syren calls me to listen to the bewitching song which cries, "Peace, peace!" while the sword of Divine wrath is suspended over my country."

CHAPTER XXIV.

What would ye have, ye curs? He, that depends
 Upon your favours, swims with fins of lead,
 And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! — Trust ye!
 With every minute you do change a mind,
 And call him noble that was now your hate;
 Him vile, that was your garland!

SHAKESPEARE.

WE shall judge too unfavourably of Alicia, if we suppose that such reflections, seconded by such an example, made no impression on her mind. Doubtless her levity would soon have submitted to the sway of reason; but the times were too turbulent to allow the Earl of Lancaster to remain for any considerable time her director and exemplar. While he was performing his midnight devotions, he saw the beacon on Lychet hill lighted; and, as the moon shone bright and the wind was calm, he knew it was not done

for the purpose of warning mariners to avoid the rocks of Purbeck : immediately after, the alarm-bell was rung at the minster, and a post from the Bishop of Exeter thundered at the outer gate, requiring his presence with all his power.

The townsmen of Wimborn, starting from their beds, gathered in the streets panic-struck, inquiring what caused this alarm. Report stated that the King had raised a great army in Devonshire, had taken Exeter by surprize, and, every where putting the nobility and gentry to death, was now within a few miles of Wimborn, coming to burn the castle of the Earl of Lancaster, after which he would march to London. "What!" said the burghers;" the King in arms, taking his own towns, putting his subjects to death, and storming the castle of his loyal kinsman!" Only a few of the populace were present; among whom a threatening murmur circulated, that they should

soon see better times. The alarmed assembly could ascertain nothing, but that an immense host was advancing from the west, seizing the magazines which Bishop Stapleton had collected, and destroying all who opposed their progress. With the indecision of men new to danger, and alike destitute of resources and public spirit, they stood bewailing the increase of misery that this insurrection must occasion, or contriving how they might best secure their own persons and property, when an order arrived from the Earl of Lancaster, commanding them to arm, form into a body for their own defence ; and without loss of time place a guard on the families of all the artizans and peasants whom they did not find in their cabins, securing the former as pledges, to answer for the peaceable behaviour of the latter. A necessity for the utmost celerity and decision was enforced by the intelligence, that there was a deeply-con-

certed and widely-organized insurrection of the lower orders in the western countries, who, with an infatuation not uncommon to extreme ignorance, goaded by insupportable want, referred all their sufferings to the tyranny and injustice of man, and required that their hunger should be immediately appeased by a distribution of those stores, which their good Bishop had collected to be husbanded with a frugal care, proportioned to the many months that would intervene before the earth would furnish another supply. The passions of the vulgar were inflamed to madness by an impostor, named Pendergrass, who put himself at their head ; and, claiming to be the true son of King Edward the First, deluded those who are ever prone to believe what is marvellous, and to rejoice at seeing a person whom they have recognized as their equal, trample on dignity, authority and law. Desperate villains and needy adventurers were

gained over by the allurements which he held out to their rapacity, from plundering those farms and unwall'd towns, which, in the first effervescence of commotion, became his prey ; and of these desperadoes, he admitted the most ferocious and enterprising into his councils, and appointed them to command his banditti.

With that blind fury which often leads an infatuated multitude to confound the name and actions of benefactors and oppressors, the mob determined to sacrifice their patriarchal bishop ; but as their threats announced this intention, Walter de Stapleton, being unprovided with means of resistance, had just time to save his life by flight, and to hold a conference with the Earl of Lancaster, to whose martial talents and vigorous age he confided the safety of the depôts, on which the country relied for preservation from absolute want : much dependance, also, was placed on the popularity of the Earl,

whom the Bishop furnished with documents to prove the birth and connections of the impostor ; but since his own life was so particularly threatened, Lancaster advised him to hasten to London, and advise the King to array his troops, and march into the west, provided the army of Pendergrass should not be immediately overpowered.

The first efforts of the Earl of Lancaster were directed to secure the magazines in the neighbourhood of Wimborn, whither, with his armed houshold, he marched before sun-rise. But when he arrived, he found them already in possession of the populace, who, after loading themselves with as much grain as they could carry to their families, in the true spirit of wanton destruction, careless of to-morrow's wants, set fire to the rest. The Earl advanced on horseback at full speed, followed by his men at arms ; and, wielding the sword which once filled the

grasp of his royal uncle, called on the marauders, on peril of their lives, to desist from their ravage, and submit. "If hell has not loosed her engines of destruction on earth," said he, "this damned purpose shall be interrupted. Sound, trumpets ! If they are mortal, not a soul shall survive the first charge of my troopers. What, is not the wrath of heaven sufficient ? Have not wasting torrents, untimely frosts, and cruel blasts, done enough to blight the hopes of men, on whose industry the shrouded sun never looked from the sky with a smile of promise ; but must Satan send forth his children to light the torch of ravage before the steps of famine ? Traitors ! 'tis Thomas of Lancaster, who at his gates daily relieves your necessities, that now requires your submission or your blood !"

Expecting to accomplish their designs before they were suspected, the incendiaries came unarmed ; resistance, there-

fore, was impossible. Some sought to appease the Earl by prostration, others attempted flight, all were seized; and, with the exception of the two ringleaders, whom the summary justice of the times doomed to become victims to the flames they had kindled, all were pardoned, and immediately enrolled under the banner of Lancaster, to march against the other rebels, their families remaining under the guard of the townsmen of Wimborn; the Earl further ordered that their daily dole of bread should be subject to deduction, to make up for the quantity thus wantonly wasted, which, owing to his timely interposition, bore but a small proportion to what was preserved. Encouraged by the successful issue of his first attempt, the Earl immediately proceeded towards Devonshire to arrest the progress of the impostor.

Had the abilities of Pendergrass been rightly directed, he would have deserved

a different place in the page of history, than that which his knavery and ambition have now awarded him. The pretences he held forth to the populace were founded on those common topics, by which the multitude have, from the earliest times, been ensnared and betrayed, — agrarian laws, the abolition of burthensome tenures, exemption from tithes and from taxes, immunity from punishment, and cessation of labour. Such was to be the enviable portion of all his followers; but those who distinguished themselves by peculiar zeal, in restoring him to his rights, were to be the founders of a new race of nobility, and rewarded with the castles and lands of those whom, Pendergrass said, must be sacrificed to introduce the new system of things, and to cut up oppression by the roots. Under these pretences, and seconded by such aid, this impostor succeeded in laying waste those countries, which, being fur-

thrust from the Scots, contained the chief resources of the kingdom. Surrounded by peers worthy of their mock monarch, who were dignified with the titles of the barons and gentry that had already fallen, the awkward dignity, plundered trappings, and braggart insolence of these mimicks of true nobility, might be compared to the meteoric parhelion, as opposed to the sun, misplaced in situation, speedily formed, and instantaneously dispersed. While the blessed luminary holds its course from age to age, shedding salubrious influence, the phantom mockery neither warms nor cherishes, appears but as the prognostic of evil, alarms, confounds and vanishes.

As the Earl of Lancaster hastened forward to limit the resources and prevent the ravages of Pendergrass, his great reputation preceding his march everywhere brought additions to his force from the well-disposed ; broke the organized

system of revolt ; and even attracted those who before purposed to join the impostor. Not daring to leave these latter behind, he enrolled them in his army, entrusting the towns and magazines to the defence of the respectable inhabitants, whom he armed with weapons, supplied by the neighbouring barons, or from the public depôts. The barons he conjured to be vigilant and brave, remembering how deeply their own security was interwoven with the permanence of the existing constitution, and how entirely the lives of themselves and their families depended on the preservation of the granaries. Nor was Lancaster afraid of treachery from the disorderly rabble, at whose head he appeared ; for, by adapting his demeanour to their habits, he soon converted them into loyal soldiers. He rode in the front of his host, in a suit of plain armour, holding the sword of the King, his uncle, to whose memory and victories he often

appealed, kissing the hilt, and praying heaven to protect that monarch's son, now their lawful sovereign. First in toil and danger, but the last to allow himself any relaxation, he daily inspected the distribution of the rations; and when he had seen each soldier served, took his own share, which, eating on horseback as he rode along the ranks, he shewed was as scanty and simple as their own. Frequently dismounting, he proceeded on foot; and appropriated even his own favourite war-horse to the conveyance of those who were fatigued by the rapidity of his march. The sentinel going his nightly round, saw the Earl watchful in his tent, engaged either in prayer or in conversation with his principal officers. Thus conspicuously devout, humane, and temperate, he gave his virtues the publicity which the times required, and even called on rumour to contrast his conduct with the behaviour

of Pendergrass, who, with the usual inconsistency of those who pretend to proclaim peace to cottages and war on palaces, soon shewed that he bore enmity not to luxury and oppression, but to the existing race of luxurious oppressors. By industry and skill in his trade, Pendergrass, early in life, had acquired that degree of affluence, which gave him an over-weening confidence in his own talents ; and, without familiarizing him with the temptations, discovered too many of the advantages of prosperity for him to submit easily to adverse fortune. How bitter is recollected rest to him, who is again compelled to labour !—how tormenting the recollection of independence to one grinding under the lash of oppression !—and how grating the thought of past importance to the man, whose opinions no one now regards, whose actions no one observes. With that common propensity to over-rate the advantages of others, and

to exaggerate their own infelicities, do the sons and daughters of labour suppose the occupations of affluence centre in the full indulgence of every animal gratification ; yet, with a want of candour and self-knowledge, which are the sure characteristics of illiterate minds, they censure the prosperous for enjoying what in their estimation constitutes the enviable privileges of rank, and absurdly think they should themselves avoid that sensuality, which, by the vehement envy it provokes in their minds, they ought to know is the temptation into which they would immediately fall, supposing they attained a situation of commanding wealth and uncontrolled power.

Pendergrass took advantage of a season of unusual calamity, to convert the general discontent into an engine to revenge his own peculiar wrong. A neighbouring baron, by a cruel and violent exercise of that feudal authority which the

petty sovereign of the castle might assert against the burgher, whose town lay in his demesne, reduced him to poverty, ruined his thriving trade, and constrained him to fly the kingdom, and earn his bread as a mercenary soldier to the Earl of Flanders. Stung to the soul by a sense of his injuries and degradation, and disappointed in his sanguine hopes of speedily repairing his fortunes by his sword, he formed a project, rather remarkable for its audacious boldness, than for the probability of its ultimate success; and returning to England when the misery of the populace and the weakness of the government prepared the way to revolt, he proclaimed himself to be the true son of the victorious Edward, to whom he bore a personal resemblance; and denounced his own wrongs as the provocation which had brought down from Heaven its threefold visitations of famine, pestilence and war. At first, he proclaimed that the change he would

effect must be an universal blessing, it being his intention to reward virtue, to punish vice, and to govern with clemency, courtesy, and liberality. But vice and virtue do not walk upon earth in their proper form, unadulterated, unimpeached, and undisguised, but mixed with each other's qualities, coloured by artifice, blended by opinion, and actuated by every different degree of intellect and feeling. Thus, to determine who deserve favour, and who merit punishment, requires not only pure intentions, but such a discriminating judgment, as can discover the pretensions and designs of others. This is a quality rarely found in those, who, by a sudden elevation to a rank above their original level, must see objects through a medium to which they are unused ; and this without being gradually prepared for the duties which they have aspired to discharge.

Thus it is that success misleads the fortunate adventurer, even if he embark in his enterprize with honest and generous intentions ; but the actions of this rebel, stimulated by revenge and ambition, and directed by fraud, must not be thus qualified. His assumption of superior goodness and affectation of patriotic designs, were only hypocrisy ; but the agents whom he entrusted with his designs, and dispersed over the principal towns in the west, were faithful to his purposes ; and the murder of the principal inhabitants, and the destruction of the means of life, marked the commencement of this promised golden age. Astonished and intoxicated at the facility by which the ignorant were allured to his standard, Pendergrass thought nothing but celerity and energy were wanting, to make the kingdom his own. He instantly affected the state of a king, according to his rude

conception of kingly dignity, and with the (to him) cumbrous trappings of royalty, he assumed its arrogance and indulgence, till his excited passions rendered him notorious for the vices he pretended to chastise. These vices were reflected in him through the medium of grosser manners, and acted on a character naturally turbulent, and uncorrected by the habits of courtesy and decorum.

Encouraged by the conviction that the King had no forces in the west to oppose his progress, Pendergrass advanced rapidly, everywhere receiving an accession of numbers, whom he armed with the weapons, and clothed with the spoil of the wealthy. His troops were permitted to wallow in luxury ; and while he thus increased the ravage of famine, all was loud boasting and brutal revelry in the rampant multitude, whom he dignified with the name of the restorers of the honour of England. He had not calcu-

lated on being opposed by the Earl of Lancaster, of whose return to England he was ignorant ; and when, from an eminence, he first beheld that chieftain advance, he concluded it was the mob of Dorsetshire collected by his own agents, and approaching to join him in military array. That hope was frustrated, when he received no cordial greetings ; but as their numbers were comparatively contemptible, he threw his eyes on his own thousands, and felt confident of success. He marshalled his men with judgment, and addressed them in a well-adapted speech, telling them if they would preserve the freedom they had so gloriously acquired, they must sweep from the earth the hirelings of an usurper, — the serfs and villains, who had rather till the ground for a tyrant as his slaves, and be fed like dogs, than sit at the boards and drink with the baron, and salute the baroness. Aware of the influence which is acquired

by appearing to be familiar with the counsels of heaven, and pretending to engage Omniscience as a partisan, Pendergrass had secured an interpreter of the Divine will in the person of an abandoned monk, who had been his instrument in persuading the people, that their bad harvests were judgments on the land, which refused to acknowledge its true sovereign. This man now came forward to assure the host, that in the visions of the preceding night he had been fore-shewn this encounter, and had seen the dead body of the Earl of Lancaster pierced with their innumerable arrows, while his troops fell like ripe bulrushes in a storm. But more valiant at plundering than fighting, the insurgents drew back, scared at the attitude of their opposers, who came on slowly, but with the well-appointed array of military discipline. To brace their failing courage, the false prophet again promised immediate admission into

paradise to all who fell; and, further, that the present should be their only impediment in their way to London. Scarcely had this latter prediction been uttered, when the red rose banner was developed in front of the Lancasterian army; and the Earl, raising his vizor, discovered his well-known and venerated countenance. A cry of "the good Earl of Lancaster!" was raised by his own host; admiration is infectious; and the acclamations of repentance were only withheld by a fear that they sinned beyond reach of clemency. In vain did Pendergrass exclaim against the curled and perfumed sycophants of a luxurious but enervated court, whose power only spoke in cruelty, and whose revels consumed the food of those who fought and toiled to support their slothful imbecility. None of these charges could be advanced against the nobleman, who, now delivering his sword to his armour-bearer, advanced waving

a white flag ; and who, addressing them by the name of deluded fellow-subjects, asked why they were in arms. Like most of the English of those days, Pendergrass was skilled in the use of the cross-bow ; he knew his fortunes required a desperate effort ; and, rushing to the front, he aimed an arrow at the Earl, calling out that it spoke, in the name of the King and the commons of England, destruction to the tyranny of proud nobles ! The shaft flew winged with mischief ; but, turned aside by the chains of the helmet, instead of piercing his eye, at which it was directed, it only tore his cheek without inflicting a serious injury ; though his blood, spouting copiously from the wound, dyed the emblem of reconciliation which he carried in his hand, and which was thus ominously violated by this outrage.

With cries of vengeance, the Earl's army rushed on their opponents ; but,

turning round on his own host, with a countenance rendered yet more awful by being thus basely disfigured; he forbade their impetuosity, and gave command that proclamation should be made, offering immunity to all who would throw down their arms, and give up their leaders. They who were deeply implicated in the crimes of Pendergrass, endeavoured by shouts, and the loud clarions of their discordant instruments, to drown the sound of this gracious offer; but numbers heard it, and knew that it was made by one whose unimpeached honour secured its fulfilment. These, regardless of the command to charge their enemies, debated with their comrades, whether pardon from such a man, and the chance of being fed at his gates, and received into his hospitals, were not as great advantages as being a lord or a knight in the court of King Pendergrass. Lancaster, who earnestly desired that no

blood but his own should be spilt on that day, perceiving that his offer of grace made the rabble hesitate, and knowing that doubt must be fatal to the impostor, again exposed his person, by placing himself before his own archers, with the arrow of Pendergrass in his hand, and pointing towards the rebel army. "I would," said he, "return this to the tanner's son, to tell him that our Holy Mother guards the life of her pilgrim from traitors; did I not deem it an unworthy act to rob the gibbet of its due, by giving to a treacherous knave the death of an honourable soldier, and did I not also hope that ye will yourselves become the instruments of justice, in the punishment of an impostor, when I have unmasked his full villainy. I come prepared to tell you where this man, whom you call a king's son, was born, and lived a simple craftsman, toiling at a mean trade; while the heir of the Plantagenets

was trained under his father's eye, in the exercises befitting a prince, and in the learning that is suited to a king ; I could say that the cradle of him who was born to rule thousands, was not so foully neglected, that a thievish nurse could, as John Pendergrass reports, steal the child, for whose expected birth the towers of Caernarvon were erected, whither Wales was called to view its cradled monarch, and pay homage to his infant sceptre. I could tell you that I accompanied my father into the apartment where the hope of England lay, and beheld that apartment blessed and exorcised, so that no demon of darkness could trespass on its sanctity ; and further, that nature stamped an identifying mark on the babe, which we were all called to observe, when he was in his swaddling bands ; it expanded in his childhood, and is still deeply impressed on the person of your lawful sovereign. These proofs are now

rendered needless by the impostor's own act ; this wound, inflicted upon me while I was in the act of parley, proves the baseness of his origin ; but to convince the most besotted of his adherents, I will yet put him to a further test. This sword, used in the holy wars, the conqueror of Acre gave me on his death-bed ; Pendergrass boasts his likeness, and calls himself his son ; if he be so, let him manfully wrest it from my grasp in open combat. I, Thomas Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster, Lincoln, Salisbury, Chester, and Derby, wave my royal birth and special privileges, and, to save the blood of thousands, consent to meet this impostor, who has seduced you from your homes, arm to arm, without subterfuge or hinderance, provided ye consent to return to your allegiance, so soon as I have drawn from his throat a confession of his duplicity."

He had not ended, before many a bonnet was tossed into the air, and the cry of "Long live Thomas Plantagenet!" echoed from every part of Pendergrass's army. The more desperate sons of anarchy still remained firm, persuaded that their Goliath would accept the challenge; but the hangman and the gallows seemed remote evils, and instant death menaced in the stern visage of the wounded Earl, and the tremendous sword whose iron hilt he so firmly grasped. Though Pendergrass was distinguished by the unfeeling hardihood of animal courage, the deed he had meditated, and the intrepid magnanimity of the sufferer, affected the conscience-struck assassin, and he retired within the ranks to consult his myrmidons by what means the dying embers of sedition might be rekindled. "Does he, then, decline our invitation?" said Lancaster. "He puts the blood of Anjou and England to the test, but, in the face of Heaven, we are prepared to

assert its legitimacy.” He called on his standard-bearer to advance, and on his knights to surround him ; and, clapping spurs to his horse, darted through the opening ranks of the insurgents after Pendergrass. The few who resisted, were cut down ; they who sued for pardon, were suffered to depart ; and the fugitives allowed to escape, except those who, from the splendour of their habiliments, proved themselves to be a part of the new nobility : these, with their leader, who, deprived of every resource, at last attempted to die valiantly, were seized, and put in irons. Thus, in the space of an hour, with little difficulty, and without the loss of any valuable life, a confederacy was dissolved, and an host dispersed, which, if it did not threaten the ultimate subversion of government, at least promised to increase the miseries of the nation an hundred-fold : and thus did the Earl of Lancaster first use the civil rights restored to him, by approv-

ing himself to be an active patriot and faithful subject.

Desirous that the detection and punishment of the impostor should be as public as the dispersion of his army was complete, Lancaster gave orders that Pendergrass should undergo a summary examination; and as soon as the documents which the Bishop of Exeter had supplied, were verified, that he should be executed in the presence of the whole army; himself presided in the tribunal, determined, if possible, to induce him to make a full confession, not by holding out false shews of mercy, but by convincing him that it was the only atonement which he could make to the community for his crimes.

The impostor, whom sensuality had enervated, resumed, at this trying moment, his natural ferocity and envious abhorrence of every species of superiority. He listened in sullen silence to those depositions, which, by confirming his identity,

proved his guilt. He neither intreated mercy, nor denied his offences ; but beheld the fate of his comrades, and even the gibbet erected for himself, with unaltered countenance. He heard them, successively, execrate him as the cause of their untimely end. He witnessed their last agonies, yet still remained obdurately rejecting the humane offers of the priest, who craved to prepare him for his fate, only saying he was ready, and wished that his time were come.

Lancaster ever admired fortitude, even when exerted in the worst cause, and now ordered the criminal to be led to his tribunal. “ Whence proceeds,” said he, “ this thy pertinacious rejection of the church’s charity ? Does it arise from insensibility of the enormous magnitude of thy crime, or incredulity respecting the nature of that future world, to which thy less guilty accomplices are gone trembling ? I should praise thy equanimity in looking calmly on death,

did I not fear, that it was the boldness of hardened ignorance, not the fortitude of patient submission. A rebel to his king, a violator of his country's laws, a betrayer of those who confided in his veracity, has cause to shudder on the verge of eternity, and to seek that consolation from repentance and confession which retrospection denies."

Pendergrass rolled his eyes on his monitor, and replied,—"Who art thou, Earl of Lancaster, and whence comes thy right to preach to me; thou, who hast gone before me in the bloody path of insurrection, and furnished me with invectives against the King's misrule, and the oppression of his minions? I have, 'tis true, burnt the castles of a few old dotards, who fattened on the labours of their starving hinds. Perhaps they were in them: I staid not to inquire, time pressed, and my affairs were urgent; but I never made myself the judge of my personal enemy,

nor slew an unarmed man in cold blood, and then called it an act of justice. If I denied that the fool who lost his army at Bannock-bourn could be the true child of Edward the First, whose royal spirit I felt panting at my heart,—did not his own kinsman anticipate my sentiments, by taking up arms against him, and questioning his capacity of choosing his servant or protecting his friend? Prove that I have broken the promise any of my captains made to a prisoner, or made the life of any man responsible for the crime of another. If, after all your sins, crying peccavi to the Virgin has made you the saintly Earl of Lancaster, a white-washed penitent, whom her arm miraculously shielded from my arrow, will not the sacrifice of his life secure forgiveness to the tanner's son, as in the meekness of your proud challenge you tauntingly called me? I know your word alone is wanting to send me to that eternal world, where

you expect a throne is prepared for you. But ask your conscience, whether a desire to regain the King's lost confidence has not been one of the motives that has prompted your celerity and courage ; and when you see my limbs quivering in the air, or lay my head at Edward's feet, as a counterpoise to that of his favourite, — remember to ask the lords of your party, how poor men can avoid knowing that England is governed by a vile junto of selfish knaves, when those who sit at her helm are the first to divulge the secret. Never could I have persuaded those thousands, who this morning bowed to my will, that I was a king's son, had not his brother Hereford and his cousin Lancaster taken arms against him whom I sought to dethrone, while his own wife removed the veil from his frailties, and held him out to his subjects as an object of abhorrence. If the faith which she plighted at the altar, and you peers pledged when ye did ho-

mage for your fiefs, has no force to teach her silence, and you submission ; must we, whose unsubdued passions are stimulated by wants ye have never known, and whose habits reject disguise, be merely the passive instruments by which you cut your way to fame and power, ready to bleed under your banner when you call us to take the field, or to bend under your burdens, when, from convenience, you name tyranny lawful government ? Know, Earl of Lancaster, that the people of England are apt students of that book, which the example of the great ones of the earth spreads before those who look for no truer test of right than prosperity. If ye, who stand on an eminence, are discontented and factious, or lewd and luxurious, begging friars may preach content, submission, and moderation to us poor labourers for our daily bread ; but your lives will be a comment on their sermons, and we shall follow

you in the broad trodden path, persuaded that what the great and learned practise, cannot send the poor and ignorant to perdition. Thus, my Lord of Lancaster, at the bar of Heaven the loss of my soul will be required of you, as surely as I must answer for those cowards, who appealed to your mercy by cursing me.”

“Pendergrass,” said the Earl, “I will set thee an example, which it will be well for thee to copy ; I will confess my former fault, and, confessing, will not repeat it. I acknowledge thee as my personal enemy, and as such I must not sit in judgment on thee. Thy death shall not be the bond of my pardon ; thy deeds shall be referred to our common sovereign, and I will no further represent his authority than by keeping thee in close confinement till his pleasure is known. May this interval be improved to thy own infinite advantage ! Turn thy thoughts from the misguiding example of weak

and frail man to the unerring fountain of justice and power : remembering, that when the guilt of the universe is tried at that bar, though the abuses of learning and rank may receive a heavier punishment, they will not escape who sinned, not from ignorance, but from perversely choosing a faulty model, with a view, that they might afterwards plead it an apology for the indulgence of their evil desires. He who knows when he commits a crime, is sufficiently instructed, to be wise unto salvation."

CHAPTER XXV.

—— Not poppy, nor mandragora,
 Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
 Shall ever med'cine thee to that sweet sleep
 Which thou hadst yesterday. SHAKESPEARE.

SATISFIED with the two-fold victory which he had gained, Lancaster meditated in his retirement on many a pleasing prospect. A hearty reconciliation to the King, must, he thought, inevitably result from his adroitness in dispersing a rebellion so formidable in the existing state of the kingdom. On his restoration to the royal confidence, depended his ability to serve his country with full efficiency, either as a statesman or a warrior. The awful accusations which Pendergrass had brought against him convinced him of the incalculable mischiefs that result from dis-

union between the sovereign and his high hereditary counsellors; they also confirmed his determination, never to unsheath the sword, but with reverence to the power as well as the person of the monarch. These reflections were interrupted by the appearance of Sir Robert Holland, who came to congratulate him on his success. “The holy Saint Michael,” said he, “has you under his especial keeping, for it is on his festival you endeared yourself still more to your country, in obtaining a victory by your personal courage and wisdom. Should not my lady’s apprehensions on your account be relieved, by sending her word that the rebels are dispersed?”

The allusion to the feast of St. Michael, and the reference to his Countess, were combined by the chamberlain with a look, which reminded Lancaster of more than Holland durst speak, or he wished to hear. His thoughts instantly took a new

train, and to the proposal of dispatching a messenger, he answered,—“My wife’s sensibility is very great, and who knows how far the rumour of an expected engagement may affect her. Canford is but thirty miles distant, and my absence from the troops for a few hours can breed no evil consequence. I will go myself; and you, Holland, shall be my only attendant. We have fleet horses, and can be back by roll-call. How wears the night?” “Your Grace will have ample time to reach Canford castle by midnight,” answered Holland; “and if my lady honours St. Michael as she purposed, the wassail-board will not be cleared before my horn announces my wish to partake the good-night cup.” Lancaster only answered, by ordering that the steeds should be instantly prepared. “Will not your wound,” said Holland, “terrify the gentle lady.” “To avoid that fear,” answered Lancaster, “you shall carry news

of the victory, and I, with my face muffled, will pass as a wounded cuirassier, till my wife is apprised of the disaster."

Disguised in the livery of a trooper, Lancaster, with his confidential knight, rode rapidly, the Earl agitated by contrarious passions, hoping that Alicia would remember his counsels; and again, fearing her indiscretion and culpable flexibility. The haste in which he had left Canford, prevented his positive prohibition of the designed entertainment. "Yet surely," said he, "my pleasure on this subject was known; and whatever has since occurred, tends to make the obligation to gravity and sobriety more imperative. If she keeps the feast, it cannot be in the wanton humour of wasteful carnival, but by a solemn well-appointed banquet, a sort of funeral feast, commemorative of the demise of our past glories and joys, and fearfully anticipating the awful character of the times we have not yet seen."

The horsemen drew near Canford in gloomy silence ; but silence and gloom were banished from the castle, which shone with the blaze of light, and echoed with the sound of revelry. The bloody cross was removed from the standard-tower, from which now waved an illuminated banner, describing a piping fawn inviting to mirth. Holland put his horn to his mouth, waiting the Earl's permission to claim entrance. " Blow," said Lancaster ; " for though we shall be but untrimed guests, the lady will receive us. Yet remember to insist that thy wounded trooper may stand behind thy chair, and be thy chamber-fellow." " Doubtless," said Holland, " my lady has heard of your having dispersed the rebel army, and thus celebrates your triumph." " The heavenly couriers who told me the fate of Bannockbourn," said the Earl solemnly, " may have outstripped our earthly coursers ; but this is an ill-suited method of acknow-

leging celestial communications ; I hear the rebeck, the lute and the tabor ; I see the dames vault in my hall, and the antic shake his cap and bells ; but I discern no choir singing litanies, nor priests bearing banners in honour of our angelic intercessors.”

Alicia had indeed realized the fears, instead of fulfilling the hopes of her husband ; her maidens had assailed her with intreaties, that she would allow them one more holiday, in which they promised to take a farewell of vain delights, and become henceforth abstemious devotees and ministering beguines. When she urged to Beatrice the impropriety of rejoicing while her lord was gone on a dangerous service, she was reminded, that it was now impossible to forbid Lord Surrey, who came by sea from the north, and therefore could not be met by her messenger ; and would it not be singular and incorrect, as he must come, to have no

noble persons to meet him, or could they be entertained with lenten fare and cathedral occupations, without questioning her lord's hospitality and her own sincerity? Devotion was right at its season, but the wisest men determined that there was also a time for mirth; and as to the idea of laying aside the pleasant devices which had been prepared for the occasion, on a presumption that her lord was in danger, it really was bringing his valour and military skill into disrepute, since it was known he would with ease disperse the rabble he opposed. It was at last resolved to consult Sir Hilary, who promised to give the subject a solemn consideration, and who afterward declared that he found there had been seven days of privation and holy abstraction, which, exceeding by one the number of fasts the church allowed in succession, without an intervening day of comparative relaxation, he might therefore permit a feast, on

condition that the abstemious system should be renewed as soon as convenient ; he further consented, in consideration of the pressing exigence of time, to assist in the preparation, and to allow a transformation of the painted acts of St. Cyprian. Some might embellish the marriage of Sir Gawin, others exemplify the supposed necromancy of Friar Bacon, whom admiration then celebrated as the first conjurer of his times. An enactment of these wonders was first to delight the noble guests, after which all present were to appear in fantastic habits, and take part in a dance of satyrs and wood-nymphs. The only proof of discretion Alicia gave, was her insisting that the Earl of Leicester should be invited to preside in his brother's place, and by his presence countenance the motley grope. She also wished for the company of Matilda, for rumour whispered that the widowed maid had been persuaded to see the

world through a brighter medium than tears ; but though her youth and beauty would have added grace to that fair bevy, who were “to teach the torches to burn bright,” she had been bred in the school of the Queen of Navarre, and her sentiments were too correspondent to those of the Earl of Lancaster, to render her presence desirable to Alicia’s giddy admirers. Indeed Beatrice had often so misconstrued the Earl’s commendations of this lady, as to infuse that species of jealousy into the mind of his wife, which, though it disdains the idea of criminality, pines from an apprehension of a preference awarded to a superior merit.

The feast was over ; so were the interludes ; but the maskers were in highest glee, when Sir Robert Holland summoned the warder, and was admitted into the hall with his muffled companion. In vain did the seneschal announce his entrance, and loudly exclaim, “ Tidings

from the Earl of Lancaster." All were busy in finding out their disguised partners, or in attending to the dance. A concerted clue directed Surrey to select the Countess of Lancaster. "Fair queen," said the hairy sylvan, "whom Phœbus or Adonis only should aspire to woo, on what service will you employ the faithful savage, who craves to be your slave?" "To drive blasts from my orchards, and sweep my parterres," answered she. "Agreed," said Surrey; "and my wages shall be once a day to bask in the blaze of those eyes." "For whom do you take me?" said Alicia. "I cannot be deceived," said the Earl; "for my throbbing heart avows whatever you may call yourself, you are no other than the potent queen of love." "This fancy," returned the Countess, "is as ridiculous, as that you should suppose yourself a trim gallant with those cloven-feet and that goatish vizard. I

will hear nothing about your heart, or my beauty ; but if you can instruct me how to hive my bees, or secure my nuts from the squirrels, I will either listen to your conversation, or dance with you till the blinking moon says, ‘ Good-morrow to you, stout revellers ; I must turn you over to my buskin’d brother.’” Surrey pressed the hand she offered him, and asked, if night were not the season to talk of love. “ No,” replied she, “ for night is weary of hearing the wail of broken-hearted maids, complaining of perjured lovers ; so she prefers the songs of us merry forresters, who, when we have eaten our junkets, generally sing some such roundelay as this, to drive away ouphes and goblins :—

When fleecy clouds through azure fly,
 And bees flit by on busy wing,
 On vi’let banks we wood-nymphs lie,
 And hail the blossom-bearing spring.

With beechen pipes of merry sound
 The demons of the fen we scare,
 And by the galliards magic round
 Enchant the spell-bound spectre Care.

Nor fear we, save when vernal storms
 Drive on our buds the sleety hail ;
 Or when, full-charg'd with insect swarms,
 We shiver in the Etesian gale.

With lev'rets and with kids we play ;
 The painted butterfly we chase :
 List to the wood-lark's merry lay,
 And tame the squirrel's frolic race.

No armed chief annoys our grove ;
 No dreaming monks peccavi cry ;
 And here, disguis'd, should Cupid rove,
 We'll quickly make the tyrant fly.

Joy is our queen ; we worship Sport ;
 And Love to these destruction swore,
 Haste, Sylvan, from our happy court,
 Or talk to me of love no more.

The Earl of Lancaster was not near enough to hear the conversation ; but he observed the volatile air of his wife,

and listened to her song. This was enough : he withdrew to the apartment of his chamberlain, whither Holland soon followed him. He paced the room in an agony, to which all the former trials of his life seemed but the brief woes of an infant : “ My Lord,” said Holland, attempting to stay his perturbed step ; “ the Countess knows of your victory.” “ And has it abated her hilarity,” inquired he ; “ to increase it was impossible.” “ Her joy,” returned the chamberlain, “ was of that modest kind, which veils itself in tears.” “ Does she run riot in my perils, and weep my triumphs ?” demanded the indignant husband. “ Yet, soft ; it may be the relentings of awakened conscience. Detach her from this frantic rout, and bring her to hear fuller tidings of my conquests ; but, on your life, do not reveal who waits an audience.”

Holland went on this errand, and again returned. She was dancing with Lord

Surrey ; to speak to her was impossible ; all was jollity and exultation. But this was the concluding scene of the festivity, and the pages stood with lighted tapers to guide the guests to their respective chambers.

“ Then I will betake myself to mine,” replied Lancaster ; “ but first cast my slough, before I act the serpent. Holland, fetch my nuptial suit from my wardrobe ; we must not scare a gay lady, fresh from dalliance with her courtly knight ; therefore strew frankincense on the lamp. Place on my head my cap of estate, and hang upon my bosom my jewelled gorget.”

Attired in the same splendor as when he first led De Lacy’s daughter through the admiring court, and presented her to King Edward as his bride, Lancaster entered his wife’s apartment, and seated himself beneath the canopy. On a table near, stood the potion which

the Countess constantly drank, before she retired to rest. Beatrice and the physician had mixed it on this fatal night ; the venal agents of an intentional adulterer had, for the vilest purposes, drugged the bowl.

It was not long before Alicia entered alone ; and, as if she had a premonitory warning, that she was about to take her farewell of happiness, she entered in her gayest mood, repeating the last stanza of her frolic song, glancing her eye around the room. She soon perceived her Lord sitting in lonely state, silent and solemn. She started back, thrilled by a conscious acknowledgment, that this was not the night on which she would have wished his return. Love and confidence in his wonted goodness subdued this painful emotion, and she again advanced to meet him with a smile of unaffected welcome. But he rose not, spoke not, moved not ; his features were cold and stern ; they relaxed with neither joy nor affection, and

his cheek was seamed with an untented wound. Could it be a vision? She almost screamed with horror, and feared to clasp the hand which rested on the table, lest her own should be chilled by the marble touch of death. She gazed on his face, till she almost believed his eye rayless and motionless, and with difficulty articulated, "Where were you wounded?" Then raising her hands in a beseeching posture, she seemed to expect a reply in that sepulchral tone, which, like the death-watch, would summon her to share his grave.

The living Lancaster laid his hand upon his heart, and answered,—“My mortal wound is here; but I trust my groans have not interrupted your revelry.” He then presented the night-cup which stood beside him. “You seem fatigued,” continued he; “drink this; it will soon lay you in a fast slumber.” “What is it?” said the Countess,

trembling with undefined horror. "Not," returned he, "the laughing cup of joy which I saw you kiss and offer to Surrey, as to a virtuous knight of unblemished fame; this is the draught of bitter remembrance, prepared by a husband, and of a sedative quality. It will call the past before you; allay feverish passions; and curb the extravagant flight of your vain imagination."

"Where are my maids?" said the agonized Countess, as the Earl, rising, held the beverage to her lips with alarming importunity. "Retired, I trust, to chaste and peaceful slumbers," said he; "at least none enter this apartment to-night. The doors are now secured to prevent impertinence. Holland is in waiting to guard our privacy, for time presses, and I have much important business to discuss before the second crowing of the cock."

"O my lord," said the kneeling beauty, wringing her white hands, and bath-

ing them with tears ; “ if ever you loved me, shew me some mercy.” “ They who ask mercy are offenders,” replied he ; “ is my wife one of those wretched beings, who fears to ask justice of her husband ? ”

“ Mercy, if ever you loved me,” returned Alicia, and flung her arms around his knees with a pathos of grief, which almost melted his stern resolves, and drew from him a groan that seemed to burst his heart ; he stooped to loosen himself from her strenuous grasp, and saw the ruby fade from her lips, and her limbs become cold and rigid as his own. “ She will die with terror,” said he to himself ; “ that must not be.” He paused a moment ; and while he thought of her often-pardoned levities, broken resolves, and repeated provocations, she again revived, and his renewed purpose was confirmed by her ability to sustain his terrible corrective.

“ How long,” said he, “ has my wife

doubted my love? Who is the malignant slanderer that has infused so cruel a suspicion into the mind of the woman whom I selected from all the Christian world to be the mother of my children — the sacristy of my reputation? Remember, lady, how I chose you from an unblemished house, as one whose virtue, as well as beauty, would reflect lustre on royalty; and can it be you whom I now see prostrate at my knees, doubting my love, imploring my mercy, and writhing in anguish, because I affectionately press you to drink a sanative potion, which will alleviate your perturbations, and for ever end my own anxieties?"

"Will it indeed end your anxieties?" returned Alicia, with a look in which terror and sorrow seemed to struggle with love and fortitude. "Then I will drink it — drink it without a murmur, and die, blessing and praying for you: yet grant me two petitions, suffer me again to em-

brace my son, and allow me the presence of a faithful priest. Not the ductile sycophant, who palliated or rather excited my indiscretions, but a true minister of heaven, who, while he smooths my death-bed with hope of mercy, will probe the recesses of my heart, and array all its transgressions before my weeping penitence."

"Thus," thought the again relenting Lancaster, "she has often promised, and either deceived me by her hypocrisy, or herself by her imbecility. No, the gangrene has spread too far for a slight incision; the cautery must be applied, or the cure cannot be radical." He addressed the Countess with increased solemnity,—"Your requests shall be granted. Do you rely on my honour, and I will trust my life to your secrecy. Have you yet another wish, for I must be speedy in what I have to do?"

"To be buried with my ancestors,"

said the lingering Countess, averting her eye from the loathed mixture, and vainly hoping she heard some one approaching. “ O my lord,” continued she, “ as I well know your generous nature cannot pursue the memory of your ever-faithful wife with eternal resentment, suffer my child to be often led to my grave, and shewn the spot where I crave his dust may mingle with mine. Trust me, my lord, it will not contaminate the pure and princely ashes of Plantagenet to mix with your faithful Alicia’s.”

“ Wish you, that he should be taught revenge?” said Lancaster. “ O no, no,” exclaimed Alicia; “ let him only hear that I was cut off in the morning of my existence, and warn him to improve the inestimable riches of time. Of all that passes here, yourself will be the only evidence, for my dying lips shall bless and absolve you ; and if you permit, print a blessing on the hand once pledged at

the altar, which now severely, though justly, punishes my repeated provocations."

Lancaster now feared that she artfully attempted to melt his purpose by her blandishments; and again resolved, that her sincerity and affection must not be spared one iota of the soul-purifying ordeal which he meditated. Withdrawing his hand from her grasp, he sternly answered,—“ This is not the season for dalliance, but for repentance.”

“ Oh, but for one of my wasted years,” exclaimed Alicia, “ a day, an hour to lament and abjure my folly.” She cast her supplicating eyes on her husband; the cup trembled in his hand, but his look continued firm and unyielding. He only answered,—“ You will have leisure for repentance; this will not kill you to-night.”

This unmitigated severity seemed to the Countess the signal of her inevitable

doom. That innate nobleness of mind which had never wholly deserted her, now urged her to meet with fortitude the fate she could not shun. Taking the baleful potion from his hand — “This,” said she, “is a husband’s gift; it is the sacrament of his peace, and as such I receive it, like a chaste obedient wife; I drain it to the dregs.” She drank it all; looked again at Lancaster with expostulating sweetness; then sunk upon her knees, and raised her hands and eyes to heaven in mute but intense devotion.

The Earl stood silent over her; his yearning affections longed to fold her to his heart, to seal her pardon, confess the stratagem he had practised, and recall her contemplation from the grave, to fix it on the bright vision of perpetual love and unviolated confidence. But her frequent lapses reminded him that the trial was not yet complete. This glow of heroism might subside; terror might sub-

due, fortitude or revenge extinguish love. Her sense of her own provocations might not be so deep, nor her contrition so perfect, as to prevent her from becoming his accuser : and he further wished her to contemplate her errors, under the persuasion that she was immediately going to account for them. He saw the devotion of her attitude with tears of transport. “ Noble creature ! ” said he to himself ; “ O what a goodly piece of workmanship has levity and flattery marred ! Can the base interpolation be removed, and the original impress of divine nature restored ! Corrupting dissipation, corroding sloth ! ye have done much to deface the form of pristine beauty ; but never since ye first quitted hell in the train of Satan, have ye aimed at a lovelier prey than my poor ensnared Alicia.”

He was roused from this reverie by the sound of footsteps. He turned, and

saw his chamberlain was in the apartment. The dying paleness of the lady's looks, the emotion of his lord's, the mysterious cup, the solemn silence which succeeded such agonized exclamations, all imprest on the mind of Holland the most dreadful convictions. "What have you done, my lord?" said he, gazing on the empty chalice. "What I wish not to recall," answered the Earl; "and for which thou hast neither eyes nor ears. What brings thee into my apartment?" "My duty," said the knight trembling, "requires me to state that Lord Leicester is in this castle. And further, a courier has followed us from the army; the necromantic monk whom Pendergrass employed as his diviner, escaped the fight of Axminster, and has joined an unbroken body of insurgents, advancing from Somersetshire. These are persuaded, that he can compass the death of the king and all the nobles by the

gradual wasting of some waxen figures, which he has inscribed with magical characters. They are proceeding to free Pendergrass from prison ; and your army, believing that your disappearance is one instance of the sorcerer's success, are seized with a panic, which your presence can alone dispel."

Lancaster answered, that he would instantly disabuse them, and bade him rouse Lord Leicester from his bed ; and tell him to meet him in the corridor. Absorbed by devotion, Alicia did not notice the entrance of Holland ; but was now roused by the voice of her lord, who, tenderly pressing her hands, bade her persevere in her pious resolutions, and they should again meet in happiness and love. He retired after uttering these words.—Were they not his solemn farewell ? Did they not point to a meeting beyond the grave ? Had murderers these expectations of happiness in a future world ? She would

not pursue that thought, for her provocations had been extreme, and time might be allotted him for repentance ; but her days of probation were past, her accounts must be immediately audited. Such was the rapid train of thought which passed in the mind of the lady, as her eyes followed her lord through the long gallery which led from her apartment to the stair-case. The beams of the rising sun played on his form, and the morning breeze tossed the plumes in his bonnet. He descended to the hall ; and as she lost sight of the object dearest to her heart, every other idea vanished in overwhelming regret. “ O most honoured, most dear, and most lovely ! ” exclaimed she, with broken sobs and gushing tears ; “ first of all the sons of men, and once the best and kindest, must thou fly me to save thine own life, and to avoid witnessing my dying pangs ? I shall behold thee no

more, yet let me look on thine infant image before death settle upon my eyes."

Lancaster's absence was ill supplied by the presence of Beatrice, who had entered the apartment before the Earl, and, concealed behind the arras, discovered all that passed. Her daring mind, fruitful in machinations, instantly conceived the bold design of making the stratagem of the husband instrumental to the criminal purposes of the lover. She presented herself before her lady, as if expecting her usual commands. Alicia instantly affected composure. "I am ill, Beatrice," said she, "very ill. A presentiment tells me that I shall never see another sun; I would bestow my blessing on my child; I would receive the remissive sacraments; I would also give orders for my funeral, and send a pledge of my never-deviating affection to my absent lord."

“ Surely,” said Beatrice, “ my lady has seen some alarming vision, so gay, so blooming as you just left us !”

“ Beatrice,” replied Alicia, interrupting her, “ is there any thing wonderful or unusual in sudden death ? Am I the first who has been prematurely cut down, and in the spring-tide of thoughtless gaiety compelled to exchange the robe of vanity for the swathings that veil the ruins of mortality ? Forbear to weep, good Beatrice ; I was born the inhabitant of a dying world, and have lived long enough to be forewarned by premonitory signs to prepare for my dismissal to another ; Go, and gently announce my sickness to my maidens. My time is short ; I must not be interrupted by their cries ; but I would be to them a moral preacher.” She paused ; a heavy faintness stealing over her senses increased her alarm. “ O hasten, hasten,” said she, “ and bring my child,

while I yet can impress on his remembrance the idea that he had a mother.”

Beatrice had but just left the apartment, when the Earl of Leicester entered, bearing his young nephew in his arms, and followed by Lancaster’s almoner, who came to shrive the Countess. Finding that his own presence in the army was immediately necessary to prevent the fruits of his victory from being frustrated, and trusting that all would go well, especially as he was assured that the Earl of Surrey had left the castle, Lancaster had confided to his brother’s inviolable fidelity, the stratagem he had concerted to wean his wife from her dangerous courses, and the alarming delusion under which she now laboured; conjuring him to watch her behaviour, and faithfully report if the effect of his awful medicine realized the sanguine hopes which he had formed of her entire reformation. But

still he required, that he would not, by a premature disclosure, deprive him of the exquisite transport which was to reward all his doubts and sorrows, that of seeing the changed expression of her face, when, from the supposed confines of the grave, he summoned her back to life and love. After delivering this charge, Lancaster speeded back to Axminster, with the intention of obviating the ill effects of his absence, and returning to Canford in the evening, to learn, from his consort's behaviour, the colour of his future life. In compliance with his brother's injunctions, Leicester's expressions tended to keep alive Alicia's apprehensions. He acknowledged his acquaintance with all that had passed, spoke of the poignant feelings of injured honour, and trusted that the lady would consider that she held the life of the first subject of England in her keeping. The honour of the nation would, he

said, be impleaded, if any disgrace were cast on the escutcheon of Lancaster. She answered not; but continued to caress her son, wiped the tears which dimmed her eyes with his glossy hair, again clasped him to her bosom, and bade him remember his mother. She now recollected a lament that she had learned of a troubadour, and which had been ascribed to a Gascon lady, who fell a victim to her husband's jealousy. This she addressed to her child, teaching him to chaunt with her the concluding distich : —

Weep'st thou, my child ? Thou canst not tell,
 What pangs thy mother's bosom swell ;
 Yet when thou hear'st her parting knell,

Repeat a prayer ;
 And hang around thy father's knee,
 And bid him love and cherish thee,
 Even in thy early infancy,

Deprived my care ;
 Forget me not, but daily say,
 ' Dearest mother, welladay !'

Look at me still, my lovely child ;
 Trace every feature, worn and wild ;
 It is thy mother, — she who smil'd

On thy soft bloom :

Do thou full oft beguile thy sire
 To where, amidst the minster choir,
 The banners of my race aspire,

Shading my tomb :

And ask him for a tear, and say,

' Dearest mother, welladay !'

Leicester and the priest wept at this scene: the former, fearful that these high-wrought ecstacies would overpower her, and, desirous that her affections should fully meet the proposed trials, again expressed apprehensions for his brother's safety. "Henry of Leicester," said she, "I answer you by my actions; can a mother, who thus doats on her child, cherish revenge against its father? You have been selected by my lord to be his confidant; deign, then, to listen to my solemn declaration." Dropping on her

knees before the almoner, she thus proceeded : —

“ Gay, young, indulged and flattered, I loved and wedded the noble Lancaster, — the flower of knighthood, the glory of the English court ! Invincibly cold to all but me, I soon discovered that I had power to draw his eye from heaven ; and the difficulty of my conquest increased my triumph without abating my affection. Marriage removed the veil which prevented me from seeing that our humours were discordant. I had ever been accustomed to consult my own ; and, as my lord’s disapprobation of my habits was gently expressed, I weakly thought it was not deeply felt. My own plan of life was, to me, delightful ; his seemed repulsive. I thought, by perseverance, I should subdue opposition ; or at least, as I never swerved in chaste affection, that he would think my errors venial, and leave me to lead the life I loved. Often has

he convinced my reason by his eloquence, as often roused my slumbering virtue by his example ; but when he left me, temptation became invincible, and I continued fallible, though not criminal. His high sense of honour scorning complaint, has spoken by an action on which my tongue shall be mute for ever. With a firm belief in all that the sacred oracles disclose of the future world, and conscious that I am now, for the last time, kneeling at confession, I swear that never, even in thought, have I violated my nuptial vows. Though fatally persuaded to rouse my lord from his gloomy humour by dalliance with a man who I knew loved me, yet, were every word that ever passed between us trumpeted by fame, it would not raise one blush on the cheek of innocence. Nor yet, dearly as I value life, deeply as I shudder at the fearful journey these premonitory pangs assure me I have already commenced, would I

be Surrey's wife, were length of days his nuptial gift; nor, though the grave is closing on all my youthful hopes, do I regret my union with my most dear, noble, cruel lord."

The priest instantly absolved his penitent; and was preparing to anoint her brows with the consecrated oil, when Leicester drew back his hand. "Stay," whispered he; "we urge the deception too far: imagination takes strong hold of tender frames. Observe you not, that her features are changed? My brother can scarcely have left the castle; I will overtake him. The bane has worked long enough; he alone can administer the antidote. Speak to her of the restorative power of medicine; give her hope of life; tranquillize her spirit; do any thing to sustain her till thy lord returns. Such a woman is worth a thousand common lives."

The deleterious potion had begun to work. Motionless and stupified, Alicia sunk on her bed, still holding her child, though with a relaxing grasp. The cries of her attendants, who rushed into the chamber, had scarcely power to rouse her. The priest whispered something in her ear, but the communication produced no effect on her features. He ordered, that the physician should be immediately called, who, after some private communication with Beatrice, felt her pulse, and pronounced that she was dying. Alicia had just strength to summon him to her bed-side. "My last hours," said she, "must not be disturbed by ineffectual efforts to save my life. I forbid the embalmers from touching my corpse; and, for the sake of the living, let it instantly be interred in this attire." Her maids, supposing her disease was the pestilence, asked, if this was a precaution. "As a warning also," replied the lady, signifi-

cantly pointing at the frivolity of her habit. She seemed to make a last struggle against the overwhelming stupor which pressed down her faculties. "Can this," said she, "be dying? I feel no pain." A cry for mercy, and a recommendation to her most dear husband, were all she afterwards uttered, till the potent opiate stretched her, to all appearance, a corpse.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lean not on earth, 'twill pierce thee to the heart :

A broken reed at best ; but oft a spear.

On its sharp point Peace bleeds, and Hope expires.

YOUNG.

AMONG the terrified witnesses of Alicia's supposed dissolution was Sir Robert Holland, whose significant looks did not escape the observation of Beatrice. " Away !" said she, to the screaming attendants ; " for your own sakes, fly the infectious corpse. Your cries must fill the castle with evil spirits, who will sweep us all away. Hoist, again, the bloody cross on the standard-tower, and order the priests to toll the chapel-bell, and begin their litanies. Love binds me to my dear lady, and this brave knight will stand by me, while I sprinkle the body with holy water."

Holland and Beatrice were soon left alone, when, fixing her eyes on him with significant earnestness, she exclaimed, — “ This foul deed must be concealed, or your lord will swing on the turret of Kenilworth. I have overheard all that passed, and I saw him descend that stair-case with the timidity of an assassin.”

Holland affected not to understand this intimidating speech ; he denied that he was of his lord’s counsel ; then paused ; and remarked that the lady, when dying, shewed great strength of mind to give such minute directions respecting her funeral. “ And know you not,” said she, “ why the embalmer is forbidden ? What compelled her to depart from the custom of her ancestors ? She enjoined secresy and speed. Were there any of the decisive marks of pestilence in her seizure ?” “ How should I know !” replied Holland, shuddering ; “ but surely her injunctions should be literally fulfilled.”

“ Be it your’s,” said Beatrice, “ to inform the Earl how faithful and trusty a servant he possesses in me; and teach him, too, rightly to value my worth. I will take upon myself the responsibility of ordering the interment of his beauteous victim. The noble guests, alarmed at the intelligence of her illness, are flying from these supposed infectious walls. Let a grave, then, be prepared; and with maimed and hurried rites let us inter all that remains of this most lovely, most injured lady, before the blackening limbs and distorted features tell a tale to the world, which we cannot gainsay.”

Thus left with her unconscious lady, Beatrice called on her coadjutor, Sir Hilary, to assist in compassing her designs. The priest sealed the usual entrance into the apartment, and placed a crucifix before it, requesting the prayers of all pious christians for the deceased. The private door through the chamberlain’s room,

would, they thought, be safely intrusted to the care of Holland, whose vigilance to prevent intruders might be stimulated by his fears for his master. During his short absence, the conspirators removed the Countess to the apartment of her physician, while one of the waxen figures usually carried in procession, was placed in her bed, dressed in similar attire, a sear-cloth laid on its face, and wax tapers lighted round it. All being thus arranged, Holland was informed, that the rapid change in the corpse was demonstrative of his master's crime. "The world cannot save him," said Sir Hilary, "if the body is seen. What foul construction will slander put on the unhappy lady, who, it will be said, provoked this cruelty by some unpardonable crime. In charity to the dead, and mercy to the living, instantly close the silent door of death, and preserve one parent to the illustrious orphan."

Under a velvet pall, followed by a long train of sincere mourners, the ceremony of a mock funeral was bestowed on a muffled image, while the living Countess was removed by Surrey's agents through a private postern, by which the apartment communicated with the river Stour. Here a boat had been previously moored to further the original plan, under a conviction, that when Alicia awoke to a sense of her dishonour, she would be compelled to shelter her lost fame under the protection of her seducer ; and this boat was to convey her to the galley that lay in Christ-church roads, since it had brought Surrey from Sandal castle.

While all was hurried apprehension and agonizing distress at Canford ; while love, suspicious craft, and slander told different tales, the unconscious object of so many fears and woes, wrapped in the arms of " Death's twin-brother, Sleep," was silently conveyed from all she loved.

The vessel had just stood out to sea, when the operation of the potion ceasing, the sensitive powers of Alicia were restored. So deeply had her mind been impressed with a conviction of her real demise, that the first exercise of renovated thought was a persuasion, that she awoke in a new state of existence. She felt a gentle motion, and heard an undulating sound. Was it the sail-broad vans of her attendant spirit? and was he her gentle guardian, a white-robed inmate of paradise, or a terrible avenger, sent from the court of the evil one, to carry her to those dolorous regions? With an awe inconceivable to those who have not at some time of their lives believed themselves "to be absent from the body," she feared to open her eyes, to discover the unchangeable certainty of her doom. She clasped her hands in humble solicitation. All human desires were then dead in her bosom; all that vanity or pleasure had

once imprinted on her imagination had faded away ; even the holier affections of the heart were suspended. She remembered herself only as an immortal being ; she implored nothing but admission, if to the lowest courts of heaven, where she might gain a distant glimpse of the glory of saints and martyrs.

While she was thus entranced in sacred meditation, she heard a human voice say, “ She is recovering ! ” These words impressed the certainty, or should we rather say the fear, that she was indeed alive. Her joy that the day of grace was not passed, was counterbalanced by a sad conviction, that she must again encounter temptations, to which her strength had often proved unequal ; to trials, to sorrows, greater perhaps than any she had hitherto known. “ Alas ! ” thought she, “ I hoped that I had anchored in the haven of mercy, and I am still tossing on the waves of this uncertain world.”

Yet where was she now? Stretched on a small pallet, closed round with curtains:—these she drew aside, and perceived herself in a dark room, with an aged beldame standing by her. Nothing was familiar to her recollection. From an aperture in the cabin, she caught a view of the ocean; and inquired, trembling, after her lord. “We are going to bear you to him, sweet lady,” said the old woman; “and a most good and gracious lord he is, well worthy the love of an empress.” “I do not recollect you in the household,” cried Alicia; “but most willingly do I join in the praises of my lord; where is he?” “Not in the galley with us,” returned the stranger, “but he will meet you at your landing.” Alicia asked where they should land. “Near a fine castle in Yorkshire, lovely lady,” replied her companion; “there shall you reign and revel like a queen.” The Countess concluded she meant Pontefract. “’Tis kind in him to remove me

from Canford," said she, " for that place will ever recall painful images ; but I never wish to reign or revel more."

She now felt extremely disordered ; her mind was a chaos of alarm and doubt ; her body enfeebled by the violent anguish she had endured, and weakened by the operation of the potion. She wished to make a thousand inquiries ; but her companion, vulgar, ignorant and yet crafty, would only tell her that she had been committed to her care as she lay in a trance, and that she was taking her to her lord. How that trance was caused ; the means by which it had been interrupted ; whether her lord intended her death ; and, now he found his purpose defeated doomed her to a life of lingering misery, — were all doubts she durst not directly suggest, and respecting which her attendant seemed incapable of giving her any satisfaction. The woman was fluent only on one subject, and that was indiscriminate flattery, of which the once silver

sound now grated discord on her ear. “How,” thought Alicia, “can she pretend so to love and admire me, for I know her not? How can she be in such raptures with my beauty, when, pale, exhausted, languishing, alike disordered in mind and body, I start at the haggard visage reflected by that mirror?” She tried to repose, but care banished sleep. Restorative nutriment was presented, but she recollected the dreadful cup, and feared to taste. While tears ran silently down her cheeks, she tried to ruminate on all that had passed, but her memory was dim and indistinct; every idea was confused, except the image of her young son, as they bore him from her bed, screaming to be restored to her bosom, and stretching towards her his little arms, while hers wanted power to detain him; and that of her lord sitting under the canopy, pale, stern, wounded, dressed indeed in his nuptial attire, as if to reproach her for her broken

vows, but without the tenderness of a lover or the protecting care of a husband.

In this distress of remembered anguish and anticipated woes, she had but one consolation. Among the old woman's disgusting raptures at having the honour of taking care of the loveliest, sweetest, best creature that ever her eyes beheld, she intermingled the praises of her lord, which Alicia, to whose troubled thoughts only one lord was ever present, applied to her Lancaster. As her intellects brightened, she recollected his parting words, his advising her to persevere in her pious resolutions, his assurance that they should again meet in peace. He took her hand, too, in sign of amity; happy hand! she pressed it to her own lips, she laid it on her bosom, and thought it warmed and cherished her cold heavy heart. Her lord never deceived her in words or actions. He must have forgiven her; he never could have intended her death; or if he

had, since it was plain her behaviour had softened him, he never would reiterate the direful act, at whose failure this renewal of affection told her he would rejoice. Why carry her over the sea, if he designed her destruction? She would now venture to take some food, since Lancaster could not design it should be her bane; her tears now flowed faster; but they were no longer the silent uninterrupted stream of bitter despair, but a lively gush of rapturous hope. Another comfortable reflection shot into her mind. When she believed herself dying, the pious almoner whispered to her something; her faculties were too far gone to understand him; but surely he combined the words love and Lancaster. Oh, insupportable self-reproach, that they should ever have been divided! The refreshments lay untouched before her, while, as her eye gazed upon them, her self-reproaching thoughts brought to her memory the

luxurious indulgences by which she had provoked and alienated her husband's heart.

While she thus meditated, her attendant recalled her thoughts. "What, loveliest of the lovely, shall I say to my lord when he finds you have been thus grieving and killing yourself by inches? Such kind care as he wishes to take of you!" "Dost thou think," said the Countess, "he really wishes me to live, and loves me well enough to forgive me?" "By my latchet," said the beldame, "sure your sweet ladyship must be distraught to make a doubt about it; why, he loves the very ground you walk upon. Never did man so doat on any woman. If you did but know how he once pined and sighed about you! We thought he would have killed himself with his own sword, he did so stamp and rave, and tear handfuls of hair off his head. But now you are well again, and going to him to be

his own dear wife for ever and ever, we shall all see happy days."

"It is very strange," thought Alicia, "I should not know a woman who thus boasts to be admitted to my lord's privacies. I will in future have more intercourse with my inferiors, at least I will know every inmate in my castle, and attend to their conduct and their interests, instead of bestowing my whole time on my sports. The description she gives of my lord is erroneous; but without intending a fable, ignorance assigns its own manners to those whose delicate expressions of feeling it cannot correctly describe."

The winds were favourable, and a safe and rapid voyage brought Alicia to the mouth of the Humber. So far her companion had spoken correctly; and another day, she trusted, would lodge her at the castle, where she would be met by her own true lord and husband. That lord

and husband must be Lancaster ; that castle, therefore, was Pontefract. The first interview would be a soul-searching one ; she would arm herself for it with fortitude ; and, to give to her bodily organs that tension which greatly assists the operations of the mind, she required to be led upon deck, that the bracing air of the sea might still the tremors of her palpitating heart. She seated herself in the stern gallery, and, for a while, tranquillized her thoughts by viewing the well-remembered scenery which she had frequently beheld, when, while a happy and beloved child, she accompanied her father from castle to castle, and witnessed the delight his presence ever diffused over an attached and smiling tenantry, whose history and welfare were as familiar and as dear to him as his own. This duty she had neglected, and had denied herself the reflected happiness with which it was attended. The contrast between her pre-

sent forlorn, unnoticed entrance into this broad estuary, and the pomp of her former visits, when the beacons blazed at the approach of De Lacy's household, and the banks were lined with accumulating spectators, afforded her a serious lesson. Having fully tried the unsatisfactoriness and satiety of amusements, and the bitter recollections which arise from merely selfish indulgences, she resolved hereafter to seek for real pleasure by promoting the good of others.

With eyes dimmed with tears of tender regret and contrition for that kind father whose death-bed she had forsaken, that mother whose woes she had neglected, and those mispent years, the retrospect of which was so painful, she proposed to begin the practice of affability and benevolence, by forming an acquaintance with the rowers, to whose skill and labour she was indebted for safety. With these she would converse, learn their history,

and try if she could do them good. She looked on the man nearest to her. Gracious heaven! the badge on his arm was not the red rose of Lancaster, but the wyvern of Warren. She shrieked, and probably might have plunged into the sea in her first agony, had not her frame sunk under the dreadful shock. Convulsive faintings, interrupted by the bitter wailings of despair, marked the rest of her journey, and Sandal castle opened its gates to receive what almost seemed an inanimate corpse.

Surrey was already at that residence, impatiently waiting for his long-destined victim. He had discovered Lancaster's return to Canford, previous to its being known to Beatrice; and judging his plot must be frustrated for the present, thought it might be resumed with fairer prospect of success, if he left the castle immediately. This he did, therefore, before Beatrice could inform him that his

rival had unconsciously ministered to his success; and the necessity of speed in removing Alicia's person left him no alternative but to hasten across the kingdom, and prepare Sandal for her reception.

For some time the ravisher's plans were suspended by the dangerous state of the lady, whose life or reason, his physician assured him, would be endangered by any fresh alarm. Surrey's love was a mixture of appetite and avarice: happily for Alicia, the latter passion so controled his irregular desires, that he let "I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat i' the adage." Consent was necessary to secure her three earldoms to himself; and he argued that surely the tender yielding affections of a young, susceptible and much-injured beauty, might easily be inflamed against a husband, who had made an attempt upon her life. She might hence be led to favour a lover, who had rescued her from that husband's

power, especially as he opposed all her wishes, and denounced her habits and inclinations, and as that lover's mode of life was similar to her own. If in such circumstances, place, opportunity, influence, all conspiring, she resisted the sophistry which sought to persuade her that there was neither shame nor guilt attached to the breach of her nuptial oath, and the renewal of her juvenile contract, Penelope, Lucretia, Alceste, all the faithful heroines of antient fable, and all the chaste Eleanoras and Matildas English history boasted, must sink into shade before that wondrous paragon of constancy, Alicia de Lacy.

As soon as she was judged sufficiently convalescent to bear an interview, Eubulo le Strange was sent to request his lord might be admitted. Surrey selected him from his esquires, because of his intimacy with Alicia in early life, when he was her page, and the organ through whom she received the occasional greetings of her

contracted spouse. His appearance now recalled agonizing recollections of the past, and fearful anticipations of the future. The death of her young brother, ascribed to his villainy and Surrey's ambition, the song of the old harper, disclosing the catastrophe of Emma Audley's sons, the horror and disgust which that narrative inspired, her refusal to fulfil her contract, her subsequent choice, and the events of her married life, down to her last separation from her lord, passed in review before her, as her languishing head rested on her arms, and her eyes fixed on Eubulo, almost wishing that the brother's assassin (if such he were) might be come to measure out the sister's grave.

“No,” thought she to herself, “I am reserved for a fate infinitely more dreadful. The earldoms for which one of De Lacy's children, perhaps, was sacrificed, must be conveyed by the other to this monster of lust and cruelty, who presumptuously

dares to call me his wife; and 'tis for this I am reserved. Yet whom can I blame so much as my own folly? Had I not an honourable protector, in defiance of whose will I called the vile man I once rejected, to my castle; and, as my Lancaster too justly reproached me, honoured him as I would a knight of untainted fame; suffering a little specious elegance, the shewy qualities of address and gallantry, to cover a surcoat spotted with infanticide, dishonoured by fraud and sensuality, and perhaps appendant to young William's shroud? Had I forgot my mother's abjuration of the world, and the curse extorted from her by bitter despair; or the deep but smothered groans of my most kind father? Surely this alienated hand abjured its race, when given to Surrey as the pledge of friendship! of friendship, such as triflers feel, — of light indecorous dalliance. My lord thought of all this when he handed to me the cup of bitter

remembrance. He handed it to me, but Surrey's advocate, my flattering, faithless confidant, drugged the bowl, or how came I in this castle? Lancaster would not plot his own dishonour ; he meant but to chastize my follies."

Musing on these awful, mysterious incidents, she now recollected, that an amorous intercourse once subsisted between Beatrice and Eubulo. This man, therefore, in all probability, not only knew those circumstances of her own history, which were concealed from herself ; but also the present state of her son and her husband. From what an insupportable load of anguish would her heart be relieved, could she unlock the secrets contained in his bosom ! Kingdoms would be cheaply given ; and she knew that he was venal, having often bribed him when a boy, to let her ride her brother's palfrey, or hawk with the state falcon,

kept for the Countess. Alas! she had nothing now wherewith to tempt his cupidity ; nothing but the ring her Lancaster first gave her, and could she part with what was her best monitor and dearest consolation ? But fortune was proverbially mutable, and the foresight of the avaricious makes them generally endeavour to secure a friend, whichever way the goddess turns her wheel. Perhaps, by a shew of kindness, by affected confidence, by promises of future favour, she might seduce Eubulo to her side ; at least work on his feelings, to let her know if her child recovered from his agony, when torn from her arms, and how her lord behaved when he found her removed from Canford. These, and a thousand other particulars, she might tempt him to disclose, even if he could not be persuaded to assist her in recovering her liberty.

As Eubulo stood gazing on the pale, listless melancholy of the great De Lacy's envied daughter, tears of pity dimmed his eyes; and he almost forgot his lord's message, which was to inquire after her health, and to know by what means he could make his castle a grateful residence. Alicia shuddered at Surrey's name, but affected kindness for Eubulo. The conversation turned on their youthful adventures, and soon led to the mournful event which preceded his flight from Denbigh castle. His tears copiously mingled with the lady's, which, as they flowed for her brother's death, expressed her envy at his peaceful sepulture. The flexibility and candour of Alicia were soon induced to believe that the account which he gave of that accident was real, and she remembered that when, in the warm ebullition of youthful feeling, more apt to look at an event, than to unravel

its cause, she echoed her mother's execrations on Surrey, her father, though he loathed and abjured that nobleman for his former crime, gave full credit to every circumstance which established the fact that accident, not design, precipitated his heir into a watery grave. But when, from the vindication of himself and his master from this foul charge, Eubulo proceeded to Surrey's praises, aversion returned in full force, and she bade the specious esquire tell the recreant knight to avoid her presence, till he was ready to atone for the foul perjury, by which he had forfeited his spurs, and defaced his escutcheon. "The sworn protector," said she, "of chaste and helpless women has, by some base unravelled fraud, ensnared a noble dame, whom he keeps captive, secreted from her nearest and dearest ties in his castle. Let him instantly restore me to freedom, or the certainty of his having committed one crime,

will justify the presumption that he was guilty of another."

Surrey sent Alicia a supplicatory message, craving to see her, that he might acknowledge and repair his fault. A prisoner had no alternative, when thus intreated by him who was the arbiter of her fate. She passed the preceding night, imploring the protection of heaven; and when the morning shone, allowed Surrey's visit. Never was temper at first more soothing. If his words alone were to be regarded, he was not only the most faithful of lovers, but also a hero and a saint. But his night-debauches and licentious habits had fixed a character on his countenance, which contradicted every plausible assertion. Yet, had that countenance worn the purity of a cherub, or had a seraph's tongue endeavoured to conciliate Alicia in the point that he aimed to establish, the celestial orators would have

looked and pleaded in vain ; for it was not only that he was worthy, but that Lancaster was undeserving.

He urged with energy his prior claim ; the generosity with which he had surrendered his rights, and had left her free to reject or to choose ; the despair which he felt at seeing this confidence in her favour frustrated by the influence of one to whose cold imagination and torpid affection, love was less interesting than a lying legend, and beauty not so valuable as a mouldy relic. He saw her with anguish the wife of a man, who, alternately the dupe of ambition and bigotry, now left her, that he might rebel against his King, and then torment his body by pacing at midnight the flinty aisle of some miracle-breeding chapel. Was this a bridegroom worthy a lady's love, who, balancing between the dormitory of the monk and the nuptial chamber, hesitated to enter the latter, till the titles and lands of

De Lacy and the Longspees added in perpetuity to his own, formed a long avenue of estates and honours, the end of which terminated in the throne? — his royal kinsman's throne, a prize almost as tempting to him now, as was the papal tiara to his early ambition. To compass his treasons, he sought popularity and amassed riches. Her liberal spirit had disbursed his hoards, by living in a style of munificence worthy her birth. This was her crime, and for this a poisonous potion had been given her, which, but for the antidote which faithful love, anticipating the deed, had prepared, had now laid her lifeless in her grave, leaving Lancaster uncontrolled lord of her inheritance, either to purchase a sceptre or a saintship, whichever way the temper of the times directed his dark subtle ambition.

The bursting heart of Alicia throbbed to silence the defamer, but he had touched

a theme on which she knew not how to speak. The mysterious cup, — how did Surrey know that circumstance, since no one was present but herself and Lancaster? Had her lord disclosed it to any but Leicester, and his confessor? Could they have been faithless to their trust? Surely, during the period of suspended recollection, her lips had not revealed to the vile hag whom she found in her cabin, a secret which placed the life and fame of Lancaster in Surrey's power. Even if she had, her tale must have been incoherent, and combined with the wanderings of brain-sick fancy. Assuming that authority, which in the days of chivalry even the most dissolute and tyrannical allowed to virtuous beauty, she sternly asked Surrey, where would his fabulous invention stop. "Cannot you as well say my lord went his pilgrimage to purchase a plenary indulgence for intemperance, lust, and cruelty, as charge his pure

and loyal character with treason and murder? — Bethink yourself of the oath, which you took on the day when the sword of knighthood was put into your hands, to defend the cross and the crown. You then not only abjured all unseemly behaviour yourself, but promised fraternal respect for the reputation of the order into which you were admitted. This tale of poisons and antidotes, invented to conceal the (to me) inscrutable means by which I have been brought into your castle, may astound credulous gossips at a wassailing, but will never shake the honour of a wedded lady, whose liberty you have unlawfully abridged, and now seek to impugn the honour of her most dear and noble lord.”

“Are you,” returned Surrey, “prepared to deny that Lancaster compelled you to drain a cup drugged with mortal poison, and to confirm this denial by taking the consecrated wafer, staking your

salvation in proof that I have slandered him whom you call your most dear and noble lord ?”

Alicia faltered ; and evaded a direct reply, by saying her being now alive disproved the accusation. “ Your being now alive,” answered he, smiling, “ proves the unremitting care of faithful, unrequited love. Of this castle, lovely lady, you shall reign queen ; ’tis the fortress of security, as well as the bower of bliss. Here it shall be my first care to guard you ; for beyond these bounds the marauding Scot and the destroying outlaw ravage and murder with unresisted fury. Within its walls the mingled joys of love, wine and mirth, of music, sport and splendor, will daily spread for you a never-wearying variety of delights. Turn not away your loathing eyes ; the master of the mansion must for a while be absent ; a sacred duty, the unalienable claims of justice, will call him to King

Edward's court, there to accuse cruelty, and unmask hypocrisy."

Alicia understood this threat was pointed at the life and honour of Lancaster. She protested to Surrey, that she would meet him there, unmask his machinations, and frustrate his malice. "Yes," said he, "when the fairies send you a present of wings to lift you over these battlements; till then, the Countess of Lancaster lies buried in Wimborn minster, and cannot confront the witnesses who saw her drink the poisoned bowl; but Alicia de Lacy lives, young, lovely, and at last consenting, and her abode is well-defended Sandal, till she yields to reward her faithful Surrey with wealth, power and love."

"Mercy!" said Alicia, sinking upon her knees, and lifting her clasped hands. Surrey instantly raised her, and asked if she had once found that posture so irresistibly persuasive. He swore he was not made of marble, and that she must no

longer trifle with the passion her charms inspired. What terrors, trembling penitent, then filled thy bosom ! On this side dishonour ; on that, death to thy lord. The grave, indeed, might hide thee from the former, and self-destruction has many ever-open doors ; but would thy troubled spirit ever be permitted to repass the gulph which separates the present from the future world, that it might stand by the side of Surrey when he accused Lancaster ? — and might it say, the wretched wife, whose supposed murder brought her husband to disgrace, died by her own hands, to escape the lawless passion of him who came forward as her avenger ? Her loud shriek, her invocation of the saints and angels, brought to her aid, a man whose feelings were on the side of virtue. At the entrance of Eubulo, Surrey loosed his prey, who secured herself in her inner chamber. “ My lord,” said Eubulo, detaining

the Earl from pursuing her ; “ you sent me, a child, to the castle of the Earl of Lincoln, to be trained by him in the exercise of arms. The first rules I learned, were never to offer violence to a woman, and to protect the unfortunate ; I have served you faithfully ; I will still endeavour, to the utmost of my abilities, to give you lawful possession of your contracted wife ; but the sword, which I received from the good De Lacy, must be torn from my grasp, and sheathed in my heart, ere you shall force his daughter, and I allow the outrage.”

“ Peace, fool,” said Surrey ; “ ’twas but a feint of coyness ; the lady softens, and I shall soon be blest.” “ Peace and joy to your nuptials,” answered Eubulo ; “ but till the holy church gives you her blessing, the lady’s honour and your interest alike require that I should lodge at the door of her chamber.”

This last hint conveyed to Surrey a

reproof more intimidating than the slight form of Eubulo, or the sword he held in his hand. "I thank thee for thy discretion," replied he; "her bewitching beauty, as she sobbed and trembled at my feet, made me forget, that whatever alienates her will, confirms the claim of the hated rival, who robbed me of the richest inheritance as well as the loveliest woman England contains." "Permit me," said Eubulo, "to be her page. I will persuade her to confide in your honour, by saying that, to allay her fears, you have authorized me to guard her, even from yourself; a master in the science of love cannot need instructions from his humble esquire, or I should say, if the lady could be prevailed upon to leave her lonely chamber, and join our gay banquetings, the sprightly converse and disportings of those lovely dancers, who make Sandal castle the paradise they find it, will probably soon drive from her

thoughts all weak regrets for the stern melancholy Lancaster ; chastity and constancy look magnanimous in solitude, when the soul, conscious of its own strength, prefers the sternest trials to the commission of the least fault ; but though a rock of ice cannot be broken by an iron mace, 'tis melted by a sun-beam."

This plan was adopted : a knowledge of Alicia's character persuaded Surrey that it would be successful : he bound himself to behave with the most guarded respect, and Eubulo was appointed to be her faithful esquire. Every gratification was now allowed her, except that of going beyond the walls of the castle ; and Surrey also tranquillized her connubial terrors, by promising not to take any measures against the Earl of Lancaster. Consoled by this mitigation of the peculiar horrors of her fate, which now seemed suspended, waiting the chance of better times, Alicia endeavoured to summon

her fortitude, and to affect a tranquillity she could not feel. Aware how dangerous it was to provoke a man, whose passions were only restrained by the expectation that they would be fully and willingly gratified, she tried to soothe Surrey by those compliances which indicated dawning confidence, or rather subdued abhorrence. Next to her own freedom, her first wish was to obtain some tidings of her husband and child, but the gay courteous Surrey was pitiless to the sorrows and deaf to the solicitations of virtuous affection. To every word that glanced at such an inquiry, his answer was stern and uniform, while his eyes alternately shot fiery and amorous glances. "Lady, you died the wife of Lancaster, but you returned to life the betrothed of Surrey."

Once, in the hope that some information might be obtained when the circling bowl had laid caution asleep, Alicia ventured into the banqueting-room, attended

by Eubulo, and relying on his protection; but the scene excited unextinguishable disgust, and the visit was never repeated. She had associated with the gay and dissipated, perhaps with the secretly dissolute; but had never before seen the openly profligate. The mask of manners was thrown aside,—the women were Bacchantals; the men were Satyrs. Surrey sat in the Earl's chair, under a carved canopy; but no sign of innate nobility announced the master and protector. At once a tyrant and a debauchee, his suite, alike servile and disorderly, trembled at his threats, and flattered his extravagance. Oh, how unlike the modest, temperate Lancaster, the pious instructor, the gracious lord, the considerate patron! How unlike, too, to that far inferior model of baronial dignity, this same Surrey, in the court of Isabella: gay, graceful, and elegant, unrivalled in address and equipage, first in every seemly sport, with

a soft whisper for a lady's ear, and a witty retort for her alarmed husband, — such did this man seem when restrained by the decorous habits of society ; such was he in reality when withheld by no other curb than the voice of conscience, and the eye of Omniscience.

“ I thank thee, Lord Surrey,” thought the Countess of Lancaster, as she returned to her chamber, terrified and offended. “ Contrast quickens memory, and confirms fidelity. O regretted days of peace, of calm love, of mild instruction, of progressive improvement ! O state of happiness, which with blind unthankfulness I never truly valued till I lost ! Should it ever be restored !—Sovereign Providence, I am in thine hand, and I submit to thy decrees only : whatever is my portion, make me worthy to be remembered as the wife of Lancaster.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE sufferings and constancy of Alicia soon elevated the pity of Eubulo into active heroism. The virtue which prompted him to protect her from violence, now took a more determined cast, and made him resolve to emancipate her and himself from the power of a baron, who, alternately profuse and oppressive, rendered service slavery, requiring passive obedience to the most arbitrary and wicked commands, and then giving up his agents, without remorse or assistance, to suffer for having executed his purposes. Human nature “is a web of mingled yarn,” perhaps also the hope of

being established in an easier and more honourable servitude, might precipitate the page's intention of assisting Alicia's flight from Sandal castle.

In devoting himself to her service, he naturally intrusted to her all he knew of her past misfortunes and present prospects ; but as he had not been admitted into his lord's full confidence, he could reveal little except a confirmation of her suspicion, that Beatrice and Sir Hilary had been in the pay of Surrey, employed to corrupt her principles ; and that she was removed from Canford while under the power of an opiate, prepared by the former, while a mock funeral was celebrated at Wimborn. Of her family he knew nothing ; but Alicia hoped soon to ascertain their situation. In vain did Eubulo intreat her for awhile to postpone all attempts to escape ; in vain did he describe the state of the country, then overrun by the Scots, and

plundered by bands of outlaws, who were composed of desperadoes, the refuse of both nations. These had established themselves in the wilds and fastnesses of Richmondshire, and seized all that the foreign enemy left. In vain did he inform her that the powerful noblemen, whose estates lay in the north, together with the clergy, to whom the sacrilegious enemy paid no respect, and who were hopeless of assistance from the King, had resolved to embody their vassals, and defend their property,—an event which would call Surrey from the castle, and that his absence must facilitate their deliverance. The Countess, from the moment that, by gaining over Eubulo, she perceived there was a probability of escaping, feared neither Scot nor robber; a greater danger gave her courage to brave plunderers, and patience to endure fatigue. Delay might again expose her to insult, or oblige her to be profaned by the

society her soul abhorred ; and she allowed no further suspension of her plan than what was necessary to give Eubulo time to arrange its accomplishment.

A horse-boy's dress was procured for the lady, who, at the signal of her companion, descended one night from her chamber, as soon as the sound of the orgies in the banqueting-room had died into silence. They proceeded swiftly along a subterranean passage, which in the time of siege was used for the admission of provisions. It opened beyond the drawbridge ; the full beams of the moon shone on the emerging fugitives, and pointed to a spreading yew, beneath whose shade Eubulo had secured their horses. He had just extinguished his torch, and Alicia was uttering her vows of gratitude for her deliverance, when the same beams which shewed them their horses, pointed out two men, muffled in cloaks, standing by their side. It took no time to discover if they

were friends or enemies ; for the voice of Surrey, calling on his companion to seize Eubulo, was sufficiently explanatory. The steeds had been missed from their stalls, and the suspicious, watchful Earl easily divined the rest. Eubulo retreated to protect the Countess ; but his career of virtuous enterprize was speedily determined by the arm of Surrey. “ Thy chivalry,” said he, “ deserves distinction, and my sword shall bestow it, by dubbing thee a banneret, on thy first field, with bloody institution. I say not, rise up ; but lie there, Sir Eubulo, thou double traitor ; and may thy unburied carcase last long enough to warn thy fellow-slaves how they provoke their generous but vindictive lord, till the stones of execration, thrown by the passing traveller, pile thee a fit monument.” Then, turning to the lady,—“ Fear not, sweet runagate,” said he ; “ no stern reproof shall abash thy modest conciousness ; thou art still in the

care of friends : clasp thy hands, lovely one, but let it be in transport that thou hast a knight of prowess for thy sworn protector. The feeble boy, who withered at my touch, wanted nerve to defend thee against the moss-trooping Scot, or the more ferocious banditti which ravage our valleys."

Alicia knelt by the side of the dying Eubulo. She had often petulantly invoked death ; even the disappointment of a favourite scheme of amusement, or those slight rebuffs which the prosperous frequently encounter, had (while indulgence made her froward) induced her to quarrel with the world, and desire to exchange it for a better, the picture of which, drawn with the unskilful haste of spleen, presented a region where disappointment never entered, instead of the place where irregular desires are proscribed. How was it that in her present desperate condition she did not snatch the rapier of

the page, and sheath it in her own bosom? For the first time in her life, she contemplated the terrible reality, which, while unseen, seemed but an expletive, a name, a shadow, thought of as querulous children think of the nurse's too often threatened goblin. She now beheld the distorted image and convulsive limbs of her last remaining friend, dying in her cause. Regardless of Surrey's taunting insults, she hung over him in mute anguish, almost fearing to breathe; watching every change of his features, and only solicitous to alleviate his pangs. The wound was in his chest, and the welling blood choaked articulation. A severer throe succeeded; his limbs darted out to their full stretch; she heard his last sigh; and all was silent and motionless. Relieved from the contraction of anguish, his features settled into the calm apathy of death, and their marble hue seemed transferred to those of his sad mistress.

A train of servants, summoned by their lord's bugle, conveyed the Countess back to the castle. There was an unresisting stupor in her behaviour, indicative of fixed despair. The physician again expressed apprehensions for her life; and Surrey trembled, lest a deliverer, impervious to his sword, should intervene, and rob him of his prize. He again cursed the unbridled impetuosity of his own passions, which had deprived him of the advantages he supposed his forbearance and honourable usage must have given him; he feared that he had clouded the dawn of her affection with abhorrence at his cruelty. Why stab Eubulo before her eyes?—the traitor might have been cut off without her knowing how barons correct their vassals. The bigoted Lancaster doubtless called such a deed murder. He had travelled through Spain, leaning on a pilgrim's staff, for having anticipated the slow course of justice; and when measured

by such a standard, to stab a treacherous servant was cruel. He acknowledged the deed was impolitic; and as an atonement for the alarm he had caused, he ordered the physician to assure his patient that he would not intrude upon her privacy, till she permitted him the indulgence of an interview. Alicia silently bowed her head, in acknowledgment of this respite from horror. "If," thought she, "he awaits my summons, our meeting will be postponed till the great audit, where 'I must accuse him of many other crimes beside shedding poor Eubulo's blood.'"

As that unfortunate youth had anticipated, Surrey was in a few days summoned from his castle by the sense of honour which taught the ferocious baron to risk his life in the preservation of that reputation which he daily compromised by a thousand acts of private violence. The dependants whom he punished and plundered, should not bow their necks

to any other tyrant ; nor was it fitting that the potent Earl Surrey should divide his time between the chase and the carouse while all the north was in arms, and monks and canons, leaving their monasteries and chapters, clad themselves in iron mail under their white surplices, determined to protect the fruit of their land, or die.

The awful appearance of death had now taught Alicia the importance of life ; and the wasteful incursions of severe grief and violent terror induced her to feel every intermission as a blessing, and to court every relaxation which drew her mind from brooding on her distress. Corrupted by luxurious habits, her taste once despised simple pleasures ; but now the melancholy captive found an exquisite enjoyment in opening her lattice to taste the violet-scented gale of a spring morning, and to hail the rising sun with a strain that her minstrels used to chaunt under her bower.

window, as she indolently reposed beneath her velvet canopy. While tears of regret and self-accusation interrupted her carol; the sound of the bugle and the trampling of horses drew her to the antichamber which commanded the court, and afforded a distant view of the gate. She perceived a troop of horsemen were assembled; the baron's pennon was unfurled, and a stately charger was led from his stall, hung with trappings, ready to receive his master. Her attendants implored her to say, "God speed!" They told her he was going to take the field against Bruce, and spoke of a military array, which included all the northern counties. Alicia, listening with suppressed impatience while the damsels enumerated the lords who were already in arms, at length caught the long-unheard name of Lancaster. This name was mentioned in a dispute between two of them, who debated whether the Earl had himself taken the field, or given

his troops to be commanded by his brother Leicester. At this moment she recollected, that Surrey's precautions suppressing her name and rank, allowed her only to be recognized in his castle as the stranger lady whose cruelty made their lord unhappy. She closed her veil to conceal her emotions, and pressed her hand to her heart to still its palpitations, while she listened in vain for further tidings ; but their conversation was changed to another topic, and Alicia durst not revive the discussion, lest she should betray too strong an interest, and prevent those future communications which chance might afford.

Lost in thought, she continued unconsciously gazing on the assembled warriors, when Surrey, whose presumption construed her appearance as a proof of reconciliation, rode up to the window, and, raising his sword to the lattice, entreated she would drop on it her glove as

a mark of favour to her champion, now going to chastise the blood-thirsty, and rescue the oppressed. Audacious man! the last time she saw that sword, it dripped with the life-blood of the innocent Eubulo; and did he talk of avenging murder, and restraining oppression? — “What, not one farewell!” continued Surrey, whom reiterated crimes prevented from considering why Alicia shrunk from the sight of the fatal weapon. “Not one bead dropped for my safe return, nor even for a moment draw back that veil, and gladden thy soldier’s heart with a view of all the heaven to which he aspires!”

While the Earl spoke, a trumpet sounded, and a pursuivant appeared at the gate bearing a banner. It was plain he came with friendly greeting from some baron engaged in the common cause, whose host was passing over the Warren demesne. Indignant at Surrey’s address, Alicia had

turned from the window, and thus lost an opportunity of catching the name of the leader. Might it not be Lancaster? Her veil was thrown aside, as she eagerly flung open the lattice, and caught a glimpse of the surcoat and banner; but ere she could distinguish the device, her attendants, on a sign from her lord, hurried her back to the inner chamber.

This tyrannical interruption suggested to Alicia an idea that her lord was near, perhaps at that moment in the castle, the guest of Surrey, the unconscious inmate of the wife whom he supposed was shrouded in the minster-choir; and, if so, would hospitality, religion, or honour induce a man, "steeped to the lips in guilt," to refrain from one more crime, which would give impunity and efficiency to all his past, by promising to crown his guilty hopes with fruition. The more she ruminated, the more probable did this appear; and she anticipated the murder of her hus-

band till her breathing became laborious, and a death-like dew hung on her trembling limbs. She recollected the time when the curse of Agatha produced a similar sensation. Are the imprecations of the wicked registered in heaven, to influence the course of events? Had she already suffered all the pangs a wife or a mother could endure, or might her prayers and tears avert the dreadful vengeance that was still impending?

She passed the night as she had generally spent her melancholy vigils since the death of Eubulo, watchful and apprehensive, anticipating some fearful surprize, till, overcome by weariness, she dropped into a disturbed slumber. The subject of her waking thoughts haunted her repose. She fancied herself lying in a tomb, incapable of motion, but preserving consciousness, seeing the vaulted roof of the choir over her head, and hearing the lamentations of her child and her husband;

but she was without power to console them, or to tell them that Surrey had dug a grave by her side, into which they were going to fall.

She awoke, thrilled with horror, and fancied she heard the clash of armour. She started from her pallet, wrapped her mantle around her, listened again, but all was still and tranquil as the lonely lamp which burnt by her bed. She reprobated her long-indulged habit of tremulous susceptibility, kissed her ring, and once more tried to sleep. The form of Agatha now stood over her, muttering those curses to which her recent misfortunes made her attribute an undeserved importance. Again she started ; but now the clash of hostile weapons was unquestionable, intermixed with loud shrieks and peals of laughter. The uproar came nearer ; she heard it on the staircase. Was Lancaster, overpowered by numbers, retreating to her to save his life ; and did the anguish

of a falling hero excite mirth among the fiends of Sandal? "He shall perish in my arms!" said she, throwing open her doors in an agony of imagination, which defied the exaggeration of reality, when she perceived her alarm proceeded from a very different cause than the danger of her husband, or any murderous design. The wanton girls, whose behaviour to Surrey and his knights had so disgusted her on the evening she appeared at the banquet, devoted the night to riotous revelry, after the departure of their paramours. Flushed by inebriety, when other sports palled, they proceeded to the armoury, and equipped themselves grotesquely in military habiliments and weapons. One giddy head was weighed down by a morion; another tried to lift a target, while her arm bent beneath the load. Thus accoutered, they resolved to imitate the conflicts in which their gallants were gone to engage; of course the

Scots were defeated, and the victorious English pursued their shrieking enemy up the staircase, mixing with their clanging armour those shouts and peals of merriment, which terrified the woe-worn Countess.

The riotous bevy were concerned for the alarm they had excited, and not a little apprehensive of the punishment which they would receive, should their sovereign lady, whom they had been summoned carefully to watch and humbly to serve, complain to their merciless lord of their behaviour. In the morning they waited on her with a petition, that she would forgive them, and conceal their fault. They also tendered to her their services, and requested that she would join in the amusements which the seneschal had promised them during the Earl's absence. That day was devoted to hunting; it was Alicia's favourite diversion,

though as such it presented no allurements, when granted as a prisoner's privilege, and combined with such society. But as her mind was somewhat tranquilized by the assurance that Surrey was absent, and the hope that Lancaster was safe ; so her never-slumbering desire of escaping from her thralldom was quickened by the suggestion, that it was most likely to succeed if attempted in his absence. It could not be accelerated by sitting weeping in her chamber, it might be promoted by gaining a knowledge of the exterior of the castle, and the adjoining country. She knew, at first she should be closely guarded ; but care might relax, especially if she could bring herself to affect content and tranquillity. She might meet with some person from whom she could obtain intelligence ; she would see whether any sanctuary was near, or in what direction Pontefract lay. At

least she should obtain an acquaintance with the exterior of her prison, and the situation of its various portals.

Influenced by these motives, the Countess signified her acquiescence, mounted a palfrey, and led her joyous attendants over the draw-bridge ; the terrors of the preceding night so agitated her frame, that she could hardly keep her seat, and the reins trembled in her hand ; but as the bracing gale blew in her face, her tremors diminished. How grateful and reviving was that genial breeze ! How exhilarating to one, who for months had only seen the reflected rays of the sun through the crevices of a grated lattice, to behold the glorious luminary enlightening a wide horizon of mingled hill and dale and flood, all rejoicing in his lustre. The serenity of the sky seemed to soothe and warm her heavy heart, when her attention was excited by the yeomen who marched on each side her steed, stopping

to add a stone to an already high tumulus. Had this action admitted a doubt, the well-remembered yew pointed its significance, and at the same time that it renewed her tears for the murdered Eubulo, reminded her of the care Surrey had taken to imprint his fate on the minds of his household, and the consequent hopelessness of her engaging any one to assist her, after the awful warning which their stern lord had given, by the sacrifice of his favourite esquire, on whose fate no one durst utter a remark, while, by a significant action, they were required to exculpate themselves from his guilt. The glow which the morning air had diffused over her face now died away to a morbid paleness, and sorrow resumed its wonted tenement, her heavy, throbbing, aching heart.

Her grief and fear only excited a stare of unfeeling curiosity, or a contemptuous sneer, alike insulting to the cause and the

character of her woes. The women crowded round her, and talked of their bountiful, honourable and indulgent lord. These were they who in the morning expressed their conviction, that if she complained, their shoulders would smart under the lash of punishment. It was meet : the theme was worthy of the eulogists. The sterner feeling of virtuous pride triumphed in Alicia's mind over the gentler emotions of grief. " Poor Eubulo ! I will dismiss for a season the thought of thy fate. But I will remember thee if ever heaven restores to my once improvident hand the talents it idly squandered. Thy bones shall not lie like the condemned felon or outlaw, who died in the commission of an act of outrage ; but they shall be honourably hearsed with every soothing rite, under the waving banners of the house of Salisbury. But, surely, if the imprecation of Madoc's minstrel antedated thy doom, bringing on thy guiltless head

a stern visitation for thy father's sins, the crimes and the curse of Surrey will not be forgotten."

They were now at a considerable distance from the castle, and had ascended an eminence which commanded an extensive view. The sun continued to shine in all its glory ; but it was upon a scene of still repose, which, but for his chearing beams, would have realized the image of desolation. Nor village spire, nor peasant's cot, nor corn-stacks, (the evidence and rewards of industry,) were visible ; nor did even the lowing ox or bleating sheep diversify the view, or disturb its silence. Lord Surrey's park was indeed thickly tenanted, not only by animals of chace, but by those of the domestic kind, which had been driven thither for security ; but, beyond these bounds, famine presided over the unproductive or rather wasted country. One only object met Alicia's view ; a small building on an eminence,

close to the public road. She feared to ask what it was ; and, at this instant, the yeomen prickers roused a stag from his lair, after which her companions set off full speed, leaving her with only her two guards. Weakness and disinclination alike prevented her from following the chace, nor did its once interesting variations withdraw her eyes from gazing on the surrounding country, and endeavouring to ascertain the situation of Pontefract. The yeomen were now a few paces from her, and she heard them mutter curses at being detained from the sport, swearing the stag would break out. “ The devil,” said one of them, “ has guided him to the gap in the park-wall ; he now scuds away by the cross of Paulinus ; and if he enters the copse behind it, not a soul of those cowardly jades dare pursue him on holy ground, lest the saint should torment them with cramps and rheumatisms.” “ I am more afraid of the

Earl," answered his companion ; " for I
 " have the charge of that fence ; and if
 he returns, and finds it not mended, he
 will slit my ears for neglecting his service."
 " I have the better of thee in
 that," rejoined the first speaker, " for my
 ears are gone already. However, as I
 cannot piece them out with thine, I will,
 out of pure good will, help thee to
 repair the breach to-morrow morning."

Alicia recollected having heard of the
 extraordinary sanctity of this little chapel-
 lage, erected in honour of the saint who
 travelled from the court of the King of
 Kent, in company with his pious daughter,
 Ethelburga, the bride of the Northum-
 brian monarch, when, like an angel of
 peace and love, she brought to her
 pagan spouse the blessing of domestic
 happiness, and the tidings of eternal life.
 At this spot Paulinus first preached the
 gospel of reconciliation to Edwin and his
 wondering subjects ; and a spring that

flowed hard by, served as the baptismal fount to his converted hearers. The most lawless miscreants of the north would have feared to violate the sanctity of a place, where their ancestors, casting aside their dumb and blood-stained idols, lifted their cleansed hands to the God of mercy. "Would he not, then, listen to my supplications," said Alicia, who now recollected that it lay in a north-east direction from Pontefract; and eagerly measuring with her eye the interjacent tract of country, almost supposed she caught a view of its battlements among the airy clouds which fleckered that part of the horizon.

The disappointed huntresses now returned, consoling themselves for their ill-luck by planning expedients to secure better success on the morrow. The most promising scheme was, to send for a notable fortune-teller, whose skill in futurity made her arrival in that neighbourhood a

kind of counterpoise against public disasters. They suspected that she was a thief (being known to be a courtesan), and that she held a private intercourse with the chief of the banditti, who infested the wild parts of the country. The latter objections were voted to be no one's concern but her own ; the former was declared to be disputable, and it was agreed that, as the seneschal would be sure to object, they would let her in at the low postern, and conceal her till he was gone to rest. Crowding together, they narrated wonders of her skill and prowess, of which Alicia only heard a part. She could inflict the murrain on cattle, and bewitch men and women ; fire corn stacks by a curse, and blast children with an evil eye. Nothing was more tremendous than her vengeance ; but if propitiated by gifts, and kindly entertained, she would shower gold and jewels on her votaries. Handsome, amorous knights, beautiful palfreys, gor-

geous entertainments, and a perpetual round of riches and jollity, were all included in her liberal benefactions. Her skill was extreme; for though to restore life was not absolutely within her power, she could animate a dead body with one of her familiars, and enable it to fulfil several of life's functions. Yet while munificent to others, she spent her days in a wretched hut, stationed on a lonely moor, where the broken roof and decayed walls scarcely excluded the winter storm. From this hovel it was agreed she should be fetched, and the night devoted to making dumb-cakes and weaving magical knots, to discover not only whether they should kill a deer on the morrow, but how many of them should marry barons as puissant and rich as the Lord Surrey.

This conversation was interesting to Alicia, in ascertaining that, beside the gate at the drawbridge and the subterraneous passage through which she and Eubulo

had tried to escape, there was also a small private postern, which the women represented as unguarded ; and further, that they would that night be engaged in such interesting occupations, as would suspend their vigilance. On their return to the castle, they were for some time detained outside. The summons was repeated, but the warder answered that the chains of the drawbridge were entangled, and he could not lower it. A hail-storm came on, and the women became impatient. “ Let us,” said one, “ dash across the river ; it is fordable at the east tower, where it joins the covered way ; I waded through on Candlemas-eve to see the boy-bishop, with his train, pass by to Beverley, and it was not above my buskins.” “ We shall be never the nearer,” replied another, “ unless we can climb in at the haistry window, for the lower postern is barred within side, and my lord has forbid its being opened till the Scots are driven over the Ouse.”

The interdiction of their lord was, a third remarked, sure to be disregarded in his absence ; but the falling of the draw-bridge ended the dispute, and the clamorous troop rushing over, alighted in the castle-yard. Alicia had employed the interval of this delay in minute attention. The east tower was her guide to the situation of the low postern, and she saw it rose in an inner court, communicating with the offices. These were important discoveries : to hear more, she condescended to remain for the rest of the day with her garrulous companions. Their conversation offended her taste, and pained her delicacy ; but by staying, she discovered that this inner court contained a garden of herbs, and was the site of the apiary.

“ The lady must be ill,” said one of the women, “ as well as melancholy ; she takes no food. Would it please you graciously to say what you can eat, that we

may provide it ; for if my lord finds you ill when he returns, he may order the senechal to scourge us.” “ Barbarian !” thought Alicia ; “ are these the habits of the gay and gallant Surrey, the flower of courteous chivalry ?” “ It will be all for love of you, dear lady,” added another ; “ otherwise he is as kind and generous a master as girls can wish.” “ Sycophants !” resumed the Countess mentally, “ they deserve no better treatment, who are driven by the lash to tune the harp of eulogy.”

The women now, with once voice, exhorted Alicia to eat, drink, and be happy. “ I thank you for your care,” she replied, “ but happiness is a coy guest ; and if driven away by sickness or sorrow, will not return at the first invitation. My favourite regale is a piece of honey-comb. Allow me to eat in the open air ; for the heat of this apartment, and your vivacity, overcome one who has been long accustomed to silence and solitude. You

named a little garden of herbs ; the warm sunshine has probably drawn the bees from their cells, and I shall be amused with looking at their innocent assiduity."

The request was too humble to be refused. Alicia was led into the inner court, and caught a glimpse of the described postern, but instantly averting her eyes, fixed them on the insect labourers, who flew by her, loaded with golden spoils: " Will you," said she, " permit me to wander here alone. I have studied herbs, and can amuse myself without being a restraint on your sports by my presence. Let a fire be kindled in my apartment, and a lamp set ready, that when it is night-fall, I may retire to rest without requiring assistance."

The girls withdrew, leaving Alicia seemingly occupied with binding up plants of rosemary, lavender and hyssop, but still proceeding leisurely and carelessly toward the postern, which she observed

enough to discover that its fastening was a weighty bar of iron, secured by a pin. After thus reconnoitring, she retired to her chamber. As affliction had given her energy, so fear made her practise self-command. She struck the chords of her lute, that her keeper might become less watchful, from supposing her to be occupied, and passive ; but her hand swept the strings in discord, as she counted the hours till the tell-tale sun gave place to the moon, whose obscurer ray, would she trusted, befriended her enterprize. She had too little experience of night-adventures and lonely peregrinations, to select from the wardrobe, with which she had been liberally supplied, a suit most proper for fatigue and danger. She sallied forth therefore, in her usual magnificent attire, her thoughts being wholly occupied by imagining how she could glide, with tip-toe stealth, by the door of the banqueting room, and remove the iron bar.

The first was happily accomplished, the latter defied her strength, and baffled all her hopes. What should she do — return to her chamber, and abandon her design? She recollected the conversation of the women, and trusted some private intrigue might bring a stronger arm to remove the obstacle; and she resolved to conceal herself under the colonnade, and await that chance. The unsuitability of her white glittering dress for such a purpose was now evident, and she resolved to venture again to her chamber, and exchange it for a sad-coloured hood and mantle, when, at the entrance into the castle, she met a woman, fantastically habited, and bending under a heavy load. It occurred to Alicia, that this was the fortune-teller, who, having diverted the attention of the dupes who consulted her by some mum-mery, had plundered the side-board, and was attempting to escape. The deep olive of her complexion, the wild misery

of her figure, and her singular, absurd, and mystical attire, confirmed this conjecture. Alicia retreated ; the creature closed the castle-door, and followed her. There was a sanguinary fierceness in her air, which inspired terror ; but how faint was that emotion to the horrors which followed, when the woman asked an alms in a voice which, though years had intervened since she heard it, had ever haunted her dreams, and poisoned all her joys ; it was the counterpart of her own, the voice of Agatha !

“ I have nothing to give thee,” said the agonized Alicia, to her repeated solicitations. She held her veil close over her face, and attempted to alter her utterance. “ So,” returned Agatha, “ the
 “ rich, whose portion is in this world, always tell us children of famine and wretchedness. But in the burning lake, which will be their lot hereafter, they will howl over the splendor of their vain

attire, their embroidered mantles, their chaplets of sparkling gems, their rings, and their bracelets." "I will give them to thee," said Alicia, "most willingly ; for I prize them not." "Yes," replied Agatha, "and the next moment ring the alarum for thy slaves, and hang me for robbing thy person." "No," returned the Countess, "I would sooner facilitate thine escape." "How?" rejoined Agatha. A happy thought shot into Alicia's mind, and she answered, — "By helping thee to remove that bar." "Give, give," said Agatha, eagerly ; and as she received the jewels from Alicia, the trembling lady lent all the little aid her arm could afford, to unclosethe the portal. The obstacle yielded to their united strength, and with another effort the door opened wide enough to permit them to press through.

Alicia could scarcely suppress her transport, or refrain from blessing Agatha, and

telling her that, for the sake of this undesigned service, she forgave all the bitterness of her soul-appalling curse. They now stood on the bank of the river, where it fed the moat which surrounded the castle. The sides were steep and precipitous, but the almost-exhausted water flowed gently over a pebbly bottom. "How wilt thou escape?" said Alicia, appalled at the chasm before her. "Together with thee," returned Agatha; and, throwing in her spoil, grasped the lady's arm, and boldly leaped into the water, dragging the Countess after her. A life of indigence and exertion had given elasticity to her limbs; she speedily recovered her footing, mounted the opposite bank, and ran off. Alicia remained for a moment, stunned with her fall; but she was not materially hurt; nature made a violent effort for the preservation of life; she disengaged herself from the water, and with difficulty climbed the scaur which Agatha

ascended with so much ease. Having gained the top, she stood panting, endeavouring to recover her breath, and recall her recollection. Her clothes were drenched with wet, and she shivered in the keen night air ; but she was out of Surrey's castle, and that thought was ecstasy. Nor did the perils and miseries incident to her present condition recur to damp the transporting consciousness of liberty, till she heard a whistle blown at a short distance, which, being answered by one further off, was proved to be a private signal. Had she been missed from the castle, and were these the recognitions of her pursuers ? She recollected there had not been time to lower the draw-bridge, and these sounds came from without the walls. It must therefore be Agatha, calling her companions to assist her in removing the spoil from the bed of the river. If Alicia attempted to fly, she must be seen ; their own danger would

induce them to be expeditious; it was better, therefore, to conceal herself in the brush-wood that fringed the bank, till they were gone. This determination was hardly executed, when Agatha returned with two associates, who descended the scaur. Alicia heard them say, — “ The sack is found, but not the lady. You should have silenced her with your poniard before you left her; she has got out, and will alarm the warder.” “ So I would,” whispered Agatha, as she bent over the bank; “ but ’twas a poor heartless minion, and I thought the fright killed her. Perhaps the stream has carried her away. Who cares whether she is alive or dead? I have got her jewels, which, with the barons’ cups and salvers, will, if we are speedy, reach the moors, before her drawling tongue can have raised a hue and cry to pursue us.”

This passed close to the spot where Alicia was secreted; and immediately after, she saw the plunderers retreat with their

load. From them, therefore, she was safe. Shouts of jollity were still heard in the castle, which convinced her that her flight was undiscovered; and she issued from her thorny covert, grateful for its shade, and totally unconscious of the slight wounds and bruises which would formerly have been causes of pathetic lamentation, and, as such, would have been expected to occupy universal attention. She had often been drenched with rain, while in the pursuit of pleasure, but she had not now, as was then the case, attendant damsels to prepare the bath, to help to disarray her, and present warm apparel scented with balmy odours. Her own hands were her only tire-women; with these she wrung her dripping locks, and shook her loaded garments, cumbrous from their weight and stiffness. At this moment she saw upon the ground a horseman's hood and cloak, which had been thrown off by one of Agatha's associates before he descended the

scaur, and which, in his haste to escape, he had forgot. It was coarse, warm, dry, a covering and a disguise ; what an inestimable treasure ! Beside, it suggested a further prospect of security ; for, by throwing her own veil and mantle into the river, the deceived tyrant might be misled to suppose that she had there perished, and might search the stream for her body, instead of endeavouring to explore her retreat. A sigh stole from Alicia as she executed this design, from recollecting the importance she once assigned to the vain appendages of shewy attire ; but as life, liberty and virtue rose in her estimation, they taught her rightly to appreciate these gauds of folly.

Behold now the delicate, timid, indolent, luxurious Countess of Lancaster, dependant on her own skill and energy for the preservation of her freedom and honour, and the life of her husband ! She had no human protector or guide but her

own prudence; no witness but the radiant luminaries of night; no resources but her own strength and courage. Her way lay by the fatal yew-tree; formerly she would not, even when numerously attended, have passed such a spot, at an hour when she believed the perturbed spirit was making its mournful visitations to the unearthed body; but necessity has no law; she ran by alone; and, as her trembling knees smote together, supplicated mercy for the soul of poor Eubulo.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WITH all the rapidity which her strength would allow, Alicia reached the bounds of Lord Surrey's demesnes, climbed the broken wall, ascended the hill, and seated herself on the steps of St. Paulinus's cross, just as the rising sun lighted the now distant towers of Sandal. Her first emotion was that of transport. She had obtained what, when distantly viewed, was a place of security ; but she was weary, and her only couch must be the hard stone, or the damp heath. She was faint, and the clear stream appeared her only refresh-

ment. There she slaked her thirst, revived herself by ablution, and then looked around to consider how her other necessities could be supplied. Her stiffening limbs soon evinced that her strength was not at present equal to the attempt of reaching Pontefract ; and supposing she concealed herself in the sacred copse behind the chapelage, how could her hunger be supplied ? She had never before found hunger a misery ; she had only experienced it as an agreeable provocative to repast, and consequently had ranked complaining of its pangs among those sins of impatience, of which her parents told her the poor were shamefully guilty. She now found its cravings were insupportable ; and observing some ruined dwellings near, determined to drag her weary limbs to them, and see if there was any remaining inhabitant who could afford her assistance.

But ere she set out with this humble design, she saw a traveller turn out of the road, to pay his devotions at the cross. How grateful to the forlorn daughter of De Lacy was the human figure; how more than grateful when she perceived it to be an aged ecclesiastic, from whom her helpless and endangered sex was sure to receive paternal aid. She knelt, imploring his protection; but mutual was their surprize, when in him she recognized Father Nicholas, the monk of Pontefract, and he beheld in her the heiress of three earldoms. The monk was ignorant of her history since the time he had left her in the full enjoyment of every earthly good. He had spent some years in pilgrimages, visiting the south of France and the valleys of Piedmont, and had returned, hoping to end his days in his own monastery. Alicia briefly stated, that she had been separated from her lord, and detained a prisoner by Lord Surrey, from

whom she had just escaped, and wished to be conducted to her own castle at Pontefract. The monk shook his head. " Pontefract, lady," said he, " is no place of refuge for either me or thee. Left without defence, and its revenues appropriated to other uses, the Scots have plundered that goodly town, and dismantled the castle. Weep not because the seat of thy father's greatness is left without an inhabitant; the sacred edifice which his bounty reared and endowed, has shared the same fate. In the roofless ruins of that cloister where I hoped to repose and meditate, I have breathed a prayer for the founder's soul.

For the first time since her calamities, Alicia accused Providence of the severity of its inflictions. She had hitherto considered that all her distress arose from the cupidity of Surrey and her own indiscretion; and therefore, as self-blame mingled with her feelings, it taught her submis-

sion. But her ignorance of common life, and inattention to the difficulties she had never felt, encouraged her to expect that her liberation from her ravisher would, if followed by amendment, be the commencement of years of happiness. She did not consider that the evils originating from our faults continue after our moral amendment has commenced, and in this respect the sins of the fathers are visited on the third and fourth generation. She had heard of castles burnt, and towns destroyed, without then considering that it was her duty to provide for the defence of her own. Of all her residences, this was her favourite. It had been built by her father; here she spent her happy youth; here she first beheld her illustrious spouse. This retrospection soon introduced self-accusation, as memory held up its mirror, and conscience summoned an accusing spirit, who spoke of negligence and waste, of selfish attachment to plea-

sure or personal security, and of unfeeling dereliction of a brave yeomanry and loyal vassals. Sick at heart, Alicia reclined her head on the monk's shoulder, and exclaimed, " My afflictions are greater than I can bear."

Father Nicholas attempted, through the trite routine of comforters, to console her. Her case was by no means singular. He had in his travels met many noble personages roving about in search of subsistence. He had entered many cottages, where death had given his darts to famine, or reigned over a lifeless family, by the side of pestilence, his eldest born. Between the Humber and the Tweed all was war and desolation ; southward, all was disease and want. " As members of the militant church," said he, " we must rejoice or mourn with the community among whom we pitch our tabernacle. Have you, lady, been more pious and charitable, more given to good works,

and less confident in uncertain riches, than the rest of the daughters of the land? if not, why expect to be exempted from the miseries which they suffer?"

The cold dew which hung on Alicia's brow interrupted the monk's oratory. "O for a morsel of food," said she, faintly, "or a pallet on which to throw my aching limbs." The ruins near them were those of the little town of Dewsbury, which the Scots had burnt at their last incursion. Thither Father Nicholas offered to conduct her. "I know," said he, "the inhabitants have fled; but perhaps some domestic animal may remain, which I can kill for your support." Alicia shuddered at the idea of such a gross repast; but so heavy were her afflictions, that it was now her greatest consolation to think she should not perish alone; the good monk would administer to her last moments, and bear her farewell to her lord; and she only wished to

receive strength to tell him the particulars of her last sad and eventful history.

Slowly and painfully they descended the hill, and beheld what was more grateful than the waving plumes of a crested knight, or the sweeping embroidery of a festal banner, namely, that token of inhabitaney and domestic comfort—the smoke of a peat fire, arising from a cabin that had escaped the conflagration. Hope quickened Alicia's steps; she just reached the tenement, and sunk upon the threshold, while the monk entered with the usual benediction of — “Peace to this house, and all which it contains.”

The family had assembled at their early meal; but they all rose to welcome the holy stranger. One invited him to a seat; a second took from him his staff; a third stooped to loosen his sandals; while the children, kneeling, laid his hand upon their heads, and asked his blessing. “Holy father,” said the master of the

family, " it is long since these parts have been visited by one of your order. You must abide with us to-day, and hear our confession." " Our fare is, indeed, humble," said the mistress ; " but what we have, we cheerfully give you." The covering of her table verified the truth of her observation, for it only consisted of an herb pottage and some boiled acorns.

Father Nicholas answered, that he had been used to hardships, and could almost dine with the birds of the air ; but he had a companion with him, whose habits had been different, and whose situation required tender attention. The kind-hearted cottagers hastened to assist the lady, who, when revived by the warmth of their fire, looked up with weeping gratitude, on those whose pale, worn features testified the pressure of their own distress while they were generously endeavouring to alleviate her's. On the

other hand, when the horseman's cloak and hood were removed, and her delicate complexion, laced tunic, and hair powdered with gold-dust, announced the rank of their guest, those privations of poverty, which are most felt by a generous and liberal heart, induced them to regret that they had nothing to offer that was worthy her acceptance. " I can fare hardly," replied Alicia to these complaints, with a sweet but tremulous voice; " if you have no conserves or malmsey, a manchet and cup of Rhenish will suffice." The good people stared at each other, suspecting the lady must be delirious, to suppose that the holiday fare of nobility could now be found in a plundered village.

" Alas!" said the worthy housewife, " once upon a time I had a good oaten cake, and a sage cheese to offer, and on saint-days could toss up a dish of buttered eggs, to relish our stock-fish, and a cup of home-brewed ale. But the Lord

Angus's troopers turned their steeds into our standing corn, and drove off our good cow-dairy. Still we had better luck than neighbour Clough ; for three of his tall sons were killed at Bannock-bourn ; and he lost his cow as well as us."

" Mother," replied one of the daughters, " the troopers never found the goat, and she still gives a little milk ; I know, too, of a nest of plovers, on the moors, that has three eggs in it, which I will fetch ; perhaps the lady might be gracious enough to eat them."

Alicia had never before witnessed the œconomy of a cottage, and was as much astonished to hear what were deemed luxuries, as shocked to discover the substitutes which want introduced. Their coarse meal stood untouched, till her own repast was prepared ; it was then sanctified by thankfulness, and eaten with appetite ; one sickly boy alone exempted, whose eye turned with loathing from his

own mess, and eagerly was fixed on Alicia's. Never had repast been so desired or so grateful, as what was now handed to Alicia on a maple dish : but the expressive countenance of the sick child drew her attention. She enquired what was his disease ; and the father answered, he was a weakly boy ; but he must not repine, for gossip Warner's children were all of that stamp ; whereas most of his were fitted for their burdens. " He is in a dry waste," added the mother, " and needs what we have not got to give him ; so he must die, unless it pleases God again to send us plenty."

Alicia now declared she would refuse their hospitality, unless the suffering child might divide her mess ; and in this sacrifice of her own craving wants to the longing need of another, she found a mental restorative more exhilarating than in all the ostentatious largesses which she had ever bestowed from her undiminished

superfluity. “ This is a true lady,” said the mother to her children ; “ look on her well. She is not like the jill-flirts who gallop by from Sandal castle. I have seen many such in my young days, when the high-bred dames remembered the poor, and tried to be like good Queen Eleanor.”

“ Come,” said the peasant, rising, “ dinners cannot be long when dainties run scant. We have now strength to dig our field. It was lighter labour ere the horse died for lack of fodder, but praised be heaven we have the use of our limbs.” “ I will pray for an hundred fold increase,” said Alicia. “ Thanks, kind lady,” returned the good man ; “ we have seen bad times of late. ‘ Twice the seasons were against us, and the seeding and the earing might go into the same sack. Once our baron ordered the crop to be carried to his own granary, and gave us a little back to sow the land, and to grind

now and then, thanks to his honour's remembrance; but the pitiless Scot wasted all, and the field would now be barren but for the blessed Lady Abbess of the Kirklee nuns, who has sent us some corn from her own stores, and bid us sow it in a hope of God's mercy."

"Surely," said Alicia, as, with a short forgetfulness of her own woes, she looked after these patient generous cottagers, "the lot of these people is peculiarly hard. How have they deserved such misfortunes?" "Not peculiarly hard," answered the monk; "I have seen thousands destitute even of their comforts; and as to thy question, lady, the mortal veil is not yet withdrawn; and I can only say, Omniscience doth nothing in vain." "I do believe thee," returned she, "and will esteem this day's adventure an admonition to my querulous regrets. I repined, because my hopes were frustrated, my earnest hopes that I

should this night repose in the towers of Pontefract. This worthy peasant leads forth his famished family ; and after four years of bootless labour, finds continual motives for thankfulness and hope."

She now consulted Father Nicholas, as to what plan it was best for her to adopt, to elude the pursuit of Surrey, and regain the protection of her Lord, who, she acknowledged, had been induced to believe she was dead. The monk had just travelled across England, and described its situation as too disturbed to permit a female to pass in safety. He recommended, therefore, a temporary residence in Kirklee nunnery, whose peaceful walls lay at a little distance on the banks of the Calder. The abbess, he said, was a lady of high rank, who had been early weaned from the world by severe misfortunes, and was a mirror of piety, charity and resignation. He had visited her convent since his return to England,

and had brought her greetings from her Provençal and Piedmontese friends. The Father said no more, aware that the wife of Lancaster, taught to adopt every iota of the Romish faith, would shrink with horror from the idea of receiving shelter from one who laboured under the taint of heresy ; and the pious abbess, as well as the good monk, was suspected of favouring the creed of the Albigenses ; the former being grand-daughter to the unfortunate Count of Thoulouse, against whom a bloody and ambitious Pope preached an exterminating crusade, which was executed by a general of the same stamp, Simon de Montford, whose saintship was purchased by steeping those rich valleys in blood, when the rapid Rhone “ ran purple to the main.”

While the Countess of Lancaster wept at this protraction of her divorce from her lord, within whose arms she wished to shelter, giving and receiving pardon,

Father Nicholas endeavoured to correct her impatience, and console her sorrows. The charitable order to which he belonged, bound him, he said, to serve and solace the children of affliction ; he was ready to attach himself to her service, to become her companion, counsellor, ambassador, and confidant, and would never leave her till she was restored to happiness. After seeing her established in Kirklee, he was ready to undertake a journey in search of the Earl of Lancaster, assure him of her existence, and conduct him to her. Alicia's eyes thanked his goodness, as they swam with tears of gratitude and joy. " Sweet flower of weeping April," said the monk, " how soon dost thou close thy leaves, when the chill blast, and the dark clouds rolling from the east, betoken a hail-storm ! And how soon, too, dost thou expand thy silken folds to court the treacherous sunshine ! Dear lady, do these acute perceptions

adapt thee for the ever-changing climate of this nether world ; or will they give thy mind that firm texture and perennial bloom which belong to the plants of paradise ?”

“ Spare me, most kind friend,” returned Alicia ; “ or if you chide my weakness, give praise to my intentions, which reveres the fortitude it cannot practise. When heaven restores to me my former happiness, I trust you will find my renovated spirit purged of all its transgressions.”

“ Let us not,” returned Father Nicholas, “ waste the useful hours of adversity by anticipating contingent virtues, which we may never be called to practise. Adversity, that pure corrective of our feverish fancies, has its own proper duties ; of these my sacred function makes me the watchful guardian ; and, dearest daughter, while I sedulously try all permitted means to restore thee to that state of temporal

good where thy loveliness flourished, compel me not to lament the unimproved advantages of that season of hard service, whose reward thou shalt reap through the long ages of eternity."

Before the close of this eventful day, Alicia presented herself a destitute suitor at the grate of the convent, and was received within its holy walls. The nuns welcomed her with generous pity, and introduced her to the venerable abbess, whose mingled benevolence and sanctity awakened filial reverence in the bosom of the grateful Countess. After such assistance as her weakness required, she was conducted to a neat and chearful, but small, unornamented cell, and with many a pious benediction and token of affectionate care left to repose. Alicia stretched her limbs on a pallet, designed for rest, not for indolence; but it was long ere she could tranquillize her restless thoughts, musing on the contrast of her

situation now and on the preceding evening, and on the different character of her residence, of her associates, and of her own prospects. In Sandal castle, all luxury, waste, riot, and impiety; here all charity, frugality, temperance, and peace. The daughters of wantonness and inebriety in one dwelling; the chaste sisterhood of religion in the other. The demon of revenge and rapine in the castle; in the convent, the holy matron, whose benevolence renounced the vain delights of the world, that she might be at leisure to administer to its wants. And for herself, she was no longer the insulted, terrified, perishing captive, but the cherished guest of melting pity, the guarded hostage of religious truth and sanctity. And did she still weep? Weep, that she was not at Pontefract; that she was not grasping her child to her bosom, nor enjoying that happy meeting that Lancaster promised; or even that she must, for a

longer time, continue ignorant of their fate? Ungrateful Alicia ! Had she escaped unknown and uninjured from the murderous Agatha ; had she seen the cheerful fortitude of the distressed, plundered cottager, and could neither preservation from danger, nor an example of meekness, teach her to be thankful and resigned? While she thus mused, the midnight worship commenced ; a choir of voices chaunted the litanies ; and, though unsupported by instrumental symphonies, she thought the service of the Virgin never sounded so sweet, solemn, devout, and simple, so perfectly in unison with the best affections of the heart. Alicia folded her hands in gratitude and prayer, and her composed thoughts soon after sunk in peaceful slumber.

She rose, refreshed from sleep, before the sun gilded the eastern pinnacle of the chapel, to attend matins, and offer an

especial thanksgiving for her deliverance. At the porch she met Father Nicholas, his sandals laced, his gown girt around him, and his staff in his hand, ready for his journey. "I have tidings for thee, daughter," said he, "which may allay thy fears, and make thy residence here easy, till I bring thee thy lord. Surrey has withdrawn from the associated barons, and is returned to Sandal castle. 'Tis said he is again under the influence of the foul fiend, and raves about the sons of a Welch prince, who have drowned a lady he dearly loved. This is certain,—the Calder has been dragged below the castle, and all is terror and distress within its walls. It was expected Henry of Leicester would sustain the red-rose banner; but on some new offence from the King, the barons have withdrawn, and the Archbishop of York leads on a host, only composed of faithful priests and courageous yeomen; these, if heaven

speeds their intent, will form a barrier to preserve this year's harvest. But woe to their hopes, if they depend on the arm of flesh, or if vengeance is now let loose to visit on England the blood and ravage of Scotland. Further, lady ; 'tis said thy lord is gone to meet the King. Grief for thy death, therefore, hath not killed him ; but joy for thy preservation shall make him truly value life. Speed my success by thy prayers ; yet, if thou art called to endure a continuance of sorrow and disappointment, remember that the trials by which martyrs and saints are perfected, must be medicinal for thee."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
 Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold ;
 Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
 When all our fathers worship'd stocks and stones,
 Forget not : in thy book record their groans.

MILTON.

THE Countess of Lancaster continued in the convent of Kirklee, improving in health of body and strength of mind, to which the regular active lives of the sisterhood, and the example and pious conduct of the lady abbess, greatly contributed. Meanwhile, the returning months of produce again brought back the incur-sive subjects of Bruce, who annually swept the provinces north of the Humber : these, when they had completed the work of destruction, returned to winter in their own kingdom. The patriotic attempt of

the Archbishop of York, to save his diocese, was rendered unsuccessful by the defection of the temporal lords, who, haughty and factious, as well as disgusted by a gross act of injustice in the King (who had bestowed the lands of a deceased baron on his new favourite, Spencer, to the injury of the Earl of Hereford), abandoned the northern counties to pillage, while they caballed how they might restrain the arbitrary exercise of the prerogative. The miseries arising from the Scottish incursions, fell chiefly on the middle classes ; the fortified castle of the baron being in general too formidable for predatory attempts, and his armed vassals preserving his own immediate demesne from pillage ; while the chartered towns, such of the independant yeomanry who had been progressively emancipated from the feudal yoke, and the lands of the church, became repeatedly an easy prey. It is an

honourable and indisputable trait in the character of the Romish clergy, that, beside their charity to the poor, hospitality to strangers, their zeal to promote learning, and to extend science, they were the protectors of the middle orders, the mediators between the baron and his vassals, the gentlest landlords, and the most liberal patrons. Happy was the cultivator, who, escaping from the comparatively oppressive yoke of the peer or knight, became an occupier of conventual or glebe lands. May we not from candour, as well as from experience of the powerful influence which wordly motives have upon religious belief, in part attribute the extraordinary influence which the priesthood then possessed, to this lenity. It may be truly replied, that this popularity was sought from political motives, and exercised in support of a corrupt hierarchy : yet, since the method of acquiring ascendancy by liberality,

condescension and protection is truly correspondent to the character of a minister of the gospel, if the influence so acquired did long uphold a church in error, would it not prove the sure bulwark, humanly speaking, to a true one.

Many zealous protestants wholly ascribe the wonderful predominance of the popish faith to its systematic organization, its lying miracles, and the authority which its artful constitution gave it over the passions of men : but our ancestors must have been a very different race from ourselves, if we suppose that the things unseen so far operated upon their thoughts, as to make them insensible of temporal advantages ; or that, while their feelings were strongly stimulated, that principle of self-interest slumbered which we feel to be so all-engrossing. They were far our inferiors in letters and in science ; but common sense has been the growth of every age, and men of clear, sound in-

telleets were not wanting in the darkest periods, who despised the fopperies, and resisted the domination of the Pope. Among the clergy of England, a volume of honourable names may be produced, who, while they preserved unity of faith with the pontiff, endeared themselves to the nation by resisting his tyranny, and detecting his impostures. Shall we, then, judge erroneously of the old English character, if we suppose that, however weak minds might be enslaved by miracle-mongers and traders in indulgencies, the real power of the church was virtually upheld by such able statesmen, liberal benefactors, and faithful subjects, as a Grosseteste, a Wickham, a Wanefleete, and a Stapleton.

William de Melton, Archbishop of York, was a man of this description : he remained at his post during the time of trial, laid aside his crosier for the defensive sword, and, surrounded by his pious and

patriotic brethren, headed the *posse comitatus* of the north, and pursued the Earl of Murray, who, with a powerful division of the Scots army, invaded Yorkshire, and was now returning home, laden with plunder. The prelate's generous attempt was unsuccessful ; military skill obtained that superiority which piety, patriotism and courage deserved. A bloody overthrow ensued at Milton, which, from the number of priests slain in their surplices, was called the battle of the White Bands. Murray carried off his spoils, and his countrymen returned in increased numbers and with additional animosity, to satiate their revenge and avarice, wherever they could find opportunity.

The reported poverty of Kirklee, and the singular holiness of its inhabitants, preserved that convent from the attacks of these spoilers, and the nuns occupied themselves in allaying the distresses of their neighbours. Their abbess, Lady

Emmeline of Thoulouse, was descended from a house known for their generosity, fortitude, and misfortunes. Her grandfather, Count Raymond, had incurred the anathema of Rome, for protecting the Albigenses, that race of protestant reformers, who, in the darkest ages, bore faithful witness against the overbearing tyranny and superstition of Rome. Three hundred thousand men, calling themselves crusaders, and protected by the same invulnerable buckler of remission of their past sins and speedy admission into paradise, entered Provence under the command of Simon de Montford, an unprincipled soldier of fortune ; they, for a series of years, inflicted unheard-of miseries on Raymond, his descendants, and his subjects. It is not clear, that this persecuted family held all the opinions of the Albigenses, who were driven into some disorderly conduct by the cruelty of their persecutors, or in the zeal of violent con-

test might have broached and supported some erroneous doctrines. Count Raymond and his family always asserted their own orthodoxy, declaring, that they suffered not as heretics, but because they would not become persecutors.

The misfortunes of her family imposed great reserve on Lady Emmeline: cautious in delivering her opinions on points of faith, and somewhat lax in her monastic regulations, it was her chief study to make her sisterhood happy, and her generous ambition that the purity and utility of their lives should divert enquiry and confute censure. Without evincing any desire to penetrate into the history of the distressed stranger, who sought an asylum in her convent, she perceived that anxiety and self-reproach were blended with indolent manners, a habit of self-indulgence, and its constant concomitant, inattention to others. To counteract failings so subversive of fortitude, generosity, and he-

roism, the abbess contrived to employ her in works of mercy, and to familiarize her with scenes of misfortune. Alicia's facile spirit yielded prompt obedience; her melting heart ever bled at the afflictions she witnessed: but the baleful effects of dissipation and prosperity were not to be counteracted by a few experiments; an indulged routine of ideas is not easily interrupted; the original cast of the mind cannot be speedily obliterated, nor a new impress stamped on the heart. The best observers of human nature admit, that erroneous propensities are even more indelible than vices.

In Alicia's impatience to be reinstated in the condition she had lost, Lady Emmeline suspected a lingering love of those delights, which she feared would endanger her oft-repeated vows of consecrating the gifts of prosperity to the glory of the Giver, and the good of her fellow-creatures. "Dearest daughter," she often

said to her, “ dost thou doubt as to what is the settled purpose of thy soul, or why be so anxious to be called to the trial? Thou dealest with one who knows, because he reads thy thoughts. The good thou hast determined to do, is done in his sight. If thy longings for the perishable gifts of fortune proceed not from a remanent affection for those vanities on which we are too apt to waste them, but with the sole desire of bestowing them in alms, be satisfied; as far as concerns thine own soul, the temple is built, the hospital endowed, the industrious assisted, the ingenious patronized; and whether that the world do not deserve thy munificence, or that there may be fear lest wealth and power would be a successful snare to thy rectitude, rest content, pious daughter, that thy destiny is determined by wisdom and mercy; perform the duties of thy present sphere, and suspend thy anxiety to act in another.”

Under such directions, both as to principles and practice, the Countess made a

daily progress in fortitude and benevolence. The return of Father Nicholas put these virtues to a severe test ; she saw him cross the cloister, while the vesper-bell sounded one evening, and we must pardon the triumph of nature over devotion, if we add that, instead of appearing in the choir, she was engaged in earnest conference with the monk : brief and heavy were his communications : he had not been able to get to the speech of the Earl of Lancaster, though he had posted after him to various parts of the kingdom : he was now at Kenilworth, whither, if the lady pleased, he would return ; but, perhaps, when she knew what business brought the Earl to that residence, she might demur. The faint remains of colour fled from Alicia's cheek, as with gasping suspense she bade Nicholas be explicit. It was to celebrate his nuptials with a rich and beautiful lady, who had been his mother's ward.

Alicia's brow was cold and damp ; but

she had one more enquiry to make ; it related to her child, and she spoke in such a piercing tone, accompanied by a look so piteous, as awoke the long-subdued feelings of affection in the monk's breast, and he could only answer by his tears. " He is dead, then !" said the Countess. Father Nicholas shook his head, and the senses of the mother were awhile suspended ; but when they returned sufficiently to know particulars, he communicated an event more soul-harrowing than the certainty of his death, — he had not been seen since the night of her pretended funeral.

It was soon known that Father Nicholas, who had been sent by their guest to inquire after her family, was returned with most heavy tidings. The nuns crowded around : her grief was not of that kind which courts compassion, but deep, full, and silent. The sisterhood kissed her cheek, and wept ; Alicia had no tears till Lady Emmeline approached her pallet, and per-

ceiving her insensible to consolation, required her daughters to kneel around her, and, while she held up her crucifix, to pray for pardon and peace to their afflicted sister. The fervency of their supplications and the tenderness of their expressions melted the despair of the bereaved mother and deserted wife. She took the hand of the venerable abbess, and with a look of filial resignation, exclaimed, "I have done with the world ; in these walls I will deposit my griefs, my wrongs, and my ashes. Give me the veil, dearest mother, and betroth me to an heavenly spouse, who ever pardons, who never forgets." She drew her ring from her finger as she spoke, and putting it into Lady Emmeline's hand, said, with a sigh that seemed to burst her heart, " Every tie is now dissolved."

The abbess too well knew the nature of grief, to consider its first dictates as decisive. She perceived that resentment mingled with the lady's sorrows, and de-

terminated that so improper and probably evanescent a sentiment, must not give the colour to her future fortunes, or provoke a fair and amiable young woman to cut the cord which bound her, not only to active life, but apparently to essential duty. Without positively contradicting her intentions, she replied, that the Church's permission to enter its earthly Canaan, could only be obtained by a year's probationary acquaintance with the advantages and temptations of a monastic life; and that if, during this period, the novice bound herself by any prelusive oaths, the sacrifice of human affections, (a sacrifice to be reserved to the time of her receiving the veil from the bishop,) was impaired by being anticipated. "Dearest daughter," added she, "let thy prayers be now addressed to heaven for patience, and when that is granted, pray for wisdom." "My children," continued she to the assembled nuns; "take no

advantage of your sister's grief, to penetrate into the secrets which, it may be, she ought to conceal. If her calmer thoughts point the necessity of asking our counsel, or suggest an expectation of relief from sympathy, she will find a friendly, and I trust a faithful breast to be the depositary of her woes."

The event the good abbess expected soon occurred, and she was herself selected to be Alicia's comforter and guide. "Your manners," said the fair unfortunate, one day when the holy matron's attentions had been peculiarly soothing, "indicate that you have known courts, and are not ignorant of what passes in the world. Have you ever heard of the Countess of Lancaster?" "The beautiful but indiscreet wife of the good Earl Thomas," answered the abbess, when a faint blush and a look of exquisite distress avowed the identity of the inquirer; and Lady Emmeline, with a self-reproach

for the quickness of her censure, added, "What mean these looks? Alicia of Lancaster lies buried in Wimborn minster." "No," replied the penitent, "her indiscretions, her incorrigible levities are buried there, but she lives to suffer and repent." "I would not," said the abbess, "have needlessly wounded thine afflicted heart, and the rash promptitude of my reply will be noticed as a call on self-humiliation, when I review in my nightly meditations the actions of this day. I will believe that the erring, flattered beauty is buried there, but that the regenerated woman lives a candidate for immortality, to set a glorious example to an admiring world, to bless her husband's age, and to walk like a guiding light to paradise before the steps of her infant offspring."

"O would to Heaven," replied the Countess, "these happy predictions could be realized; but I have no husband, no offspring." "Impossible," returned the

abbess; “ Thomas Plantagenet is not dead.” “ Dead to me,” returned Alicia; “ plighted to another! O think not I lightly parted with the ring which he placed on my finger. Mother, I do not fable; I felt the separation as if my soul was quitting its body, and every hope and wish expired. O Lancaster, no more my lord, but still ever remembered, may'st thou be happy with thy new choice; Matilda may be more discreet and obedient, but she can never love thee as I have done!”

To divert these painful feelings, Lady Emmeline inquired after her child, and the woes of Alicia assumed a different, but not less agonizing character. In describing her loss of him, she added; “ Had he been dead, I should have been content that nothing of me lived to remind Lancaster of one he must wish to forget. But this uncertainty of his fate, this dreadful suspense as to what the loved infant suffers!——”

“ Dear lady,” resumed the abbess, “ we choose not our own conditions, nor our qualities, nor know we the chastisements which will best prepare us for that state, at whose portals, sorrow and submission, our austere but faithful guides to heaven, bid us an eternal farewell. It may be, that even in this world, when thy hairs are as white as mine, and thou seest thy son flourishing beside the throne of England, the father of a numerous progeny, beloved and honourable, that thou wilt think his life better than his death. There was a time, when my sad heart panted only for the day when it could lie inurned with that of its faithful partner. Like thee, I then stood on the heights of health and youth, looking on a long course of advancing years. I am now low in the valley, and increasing infirmities (those deepening premonitions of death) proclaim that the night of my existence is at hand. Yet though I fear not the approach,

I am no longer impatient for the repose it brings. Nay, often the welfare of my spiritual children, and the care of those who look up to me for support, so bind me to this world, that I am like the querulous traveller in the fable, who continually invoked death to ease him of his burden, but when he saw the spectre near, only required assistance to enable him to bear it."

The kindness of Lady Emmeline was the first motive which reconciled the wretched Alicia to her fate, and she expressed a desire to know the history of one who thus kindly sympathized in her woes. During the first stage of grief, the mind, wholly engrossed by the dreary aspect before it, dwells solely on its own situation, and sees nothing beside. In process of time it looks around, and beholds the region it inhabits peopled by other pilgrims; it soon takes an interest in their story, and inquires by what means they

are enabled to endure the privations of their journey. The abbess owned that she had been a wife : was she a mother too ? How had she reconciled herself to the death of a beloved partner ? Did it give a greater pang than a consciousness of his living forgetfulness ? The venerable matron saw the excited curiosity of the Countess with a benevolent pleasure, which made her willing to endure the pain of retracing her early woes, from the hope of blunting the keen recollection of another.

She began with adoring the mysterious ways of Providence. The sorrows of her childhood sprang from a misconstruction of that religion, whose consolations were the support of her age. Her eyes first opened to the light in the valley of Piedmont, whither her ancestors were driven by the inexorable hostility of the papal see. Her father, a younger son of old Count Raymond, fired to revenge by the

indignities and cruelties that his race had endured, swore eternal hatred to the usurping pontiff, and all his successors; and no sooner did the contest between the emperor and the pope commence, than he joined the standard of the former, and became an eminent captain in the Ghibeline party. Following the fortunes of Conrade, and his son Conradine in Sicily, he fought manfully against Charles of Anjou, brother to the King of France, on whom the Pope bestowed that island, by virtue of his pretended jurisdiction, as vicar of Christ, to award and alienate the kingdoms of the world. At the celebrated sea-fight on the lake Celano, the fleet of young Conradine, rightful heir of Sicily, was defeated, and the vanquished prince taken prisoner. The conduct of the conqueror on that occasion destroyed all the respect which posterity might have felt for the brother of the Christian champion, St. Louis, himself also the ostensible

supporter of the rights of the church against the excommunicated princes of the house of Swabia. Without any remorse for his tender years, his innocence, or his imperial descent, Charles gave orders that the youth should be put to death, an act which must ever be attributed to his impatience to remove the rival of his throne, though he affected to ascribe it to his reverent obedience to the Pope, thus making the church participate in the guilt of the murder, while he received the regal spoil.

“ With his unfortunate master, my no less unhappy father,” continued Lady Emmeline, “ fell into the hands of King Charles. The race of Count Raymond could hope for no mercy from one who boasted that he was raised up to give God glory, by fighting the battles of his church, and extirpating heretics. From the first moment of his captivity, he abandoned all thoughts of his own pre-

servation, but the death of his prince Conradine was an unexpected stroke. Without hope or care as to the consequences, he reproached Charles as the tool and instrument of Antichrist. He spoke of the blood that had been shed in Provence, either in the field of battle, or on the blazing pile, lighted by the brothers of St. Dominic; the cruel flagellation publicly performed on Count Raymond in two of his own cities; the perfidy with which the treaty of peace was broken; and the pardon that his submission had purchased revoked, till at last his bones were inhumanly denied repose in the grave. Nor did the vehement accuser stop here. He mentioned deeds which sullied the lilies of France, and reduced their warriors to the base condition of assassins. They, led by Simon de Montford, had condescended to turn butchers in the streets of Avignon, which was sacked in the hour of parley,

and while the casuists were examining if its faith were truly obnoxious. These troops, when fatigued with slaughtering the naked inhabitants, who fell like lambs before them, asked the priests what persons their wearied arms might spare, and were still base enough to be again excited to the labour they loathed, by the diabolical command of—‘Kill all; God will distinguish the souls of the faithful.’ ‘How,’ exclaimed my father, ‘will the angel of vengeance be propitiated when its sword claims retribution for these bloody blasphemies? Will the piety of Louis efface from his father’s memory the sacking of Avignon, and the ruin of Provence?’

“So true a charge was too criminal to be punished by the mercy of immediate death. The King preserved that command of feeling and countenance which characterizes the aspiring minds who make the excited passions of others minister to

their own advancement ; and saying, he could bear and forgive the insult thrown on the memory of his most devout and royal father ; and also the foul taunt addressed to himself, for executing a just judgment on one who, if time had ripened his idolatrous intentions, would have been the Antiochus of his day, endeavouring to extirpate the faithful. He was willing, therefore, to set the *Sieur Manfred* of *Thoulouse* at liberty ; but (here he paused, to see if the countenance of his victim brightened with hope,) his confessor had noted the abominable rage which blasphemed the church and its glorious champions, *Saint Dominic* and *Simon de Montford*, for which crime the *Sieur Manfred* must answer to the fathers of the inquisition. To their care, therefore, he would consign him, trusting that they would temper justice with mercy.

“ My father,” continued *Lady Emmeline*, “ was torn from the tribunal, while

the Sicilians, in sullen silence, meditated on the character of their new king. Some, deceived by sound, praised his clemency ; others, interpreting deeds, feared his cruelty and craft. For Manfred there was no hope, except that his broken constitution might put a speedy period to his sufferings ; for even those who revered his fidelity to the race of Tancred, shuddered at the heretical descendant of the protector of the Albigenses. This brave and faithful captain, though unfortunate in all things else, was blessed with an affectionate and courageous wife, whose creed was unquestioned, and who was allied to the consort of King Charles. As soon as she learned her husband's fate, she left the valleys of Piedmont, and prostrated herself at the feet of a princess, who, in their early days, had been her companion and friend. She supplicated for her husband's life and liberty, and at last so far wrought on the Queen's compassion, as to induce her to intercede with her husband for

Manfred's release. The King, though austere, inflexible and subtle, preserved the chivalrous character of his race. He said he could refuse nothing to his Queen ; but all he could grant was, his intercession at the court of Rome, in whose prisons the victim lay. But this concession, probably extorted to appease the rising discontents of his Sicilian subjects, was of no avail ; for the rank and services of Charles, poised against the revenge of remorseless persecutors, kicked the beam. The sufferings of my father remain amongst the untold secrets of the inquisition ; — in their dungeons he perished.

“ During a long time after he was beyond the reach of our intercession, my mother continued soliciting his release at the court of Palermo. I had accompanied her in her perilous voyage from Savona, and had partaken in all her sorrows. Young and admired, the world had to me a variety of charms, when it was proposed by our confessor that I should renounce

it, and take the veil in a convent of the Carthusian order ; and, by thus giving an early proof of orthodoxy and piety, I might at once rescue our house from the charge of unsound faith, atone for the offence of my father, and purchase his freedom. My mother consulted her royal patroness : the Queen had distinguished me by her favour, and desired to speak with me on the subject. She found my views were adverse to monastic seclusion, and proposed to me marriage as an honourable expedient, announcing a conquest I had made, as I was returning from my devotions, of a lover, whose name alone was sufficient to restore liberty to my father, and reinstate us in our forfeited estates. This was no other than Guido de Montford, grandson of our remorseless enemy, and son of that Earl of Leicester whose deeds are so celebrated in the English annals. Guido was high in favour with King Charles ; rich, gay, and prosperous ; but the blood of the Counts

of Thoulouse boiled in my veins, and my first thought was,—how should I venture into my dear father's presence, after having purchased his liberty by such an alliance? My mother thought differently. She saw, in this splendid union, much to gratify her ambition, as well as the prospect of freedom to a beloved husband. She argued, that the young Count Montford might not inherit the savage qualities of his family, his father's alliance with the royal blood of England and Angoulême giving him an equal claim to their illustrious qualities; that he was cousin-german to two princes, my near kinsmen, who ranked highest among the illustrious youth of christendom, Edward and Henry Plantagenet, both champions of the cross, and expected to visit Sicily in their way to the Holy Land. She did not conceal her wish, that the Count de Montford should introduce me to my royal kindred as his bride. I had never seen Guido, but my abhorrence to the name of Montford was

insuperable. Better, I said, was the flinty couch of the Carthusian cell, than the velvet canopy of the destroyer of my race. Every frightful narrative which I had been told in my infancy, to excite my abhorrence of bigotry and cruelty, would rise to my recollection. But my feelings took another turn, when my weeping mother placed before my eyes the inquisitor and his familiars at the task of torture. ‘Where is thy father?’ she exclaimed. I answered in anguish, ‘Where is Count Montford?’ and held out my hand, as if ready to accompany him to the altar.

“Too soon did I behold him introduced as an accepted lover. Merciful heaven! even at this distance of time my heart shrinks at the recollection. I averted my eyes, and thought I beheld my father on the rack. I looked at him, and saw the counterpart of the man at whose stern mandate my grandfather’s naked body was lashed, till life almost

issued from the wounds. Even my mother was shocked at the deep design of Guido's ferocious eye. She again applied to the Queen, and confessed that filial piety could hardly subdue my aversion to this marriage. That princess bid us fear his power, but proposed to Montford that the solemnization should be deferred till, by the restoration of Manfred to his family, he gave proof of his sincerity.

“ During this respite, a galley entered the harbour, bearing on its flag the arms of England quartered with those of Castile. The visitors were Prince Edward, his consort, and his cousin Henry, attended by a noble train of knights and ladies. Splendid preparations were made for their reception. I was permitted to see the cavalcade enter the palace; and deem it not, daughter, the prejudice of age when I say, that the present times cannot shew such an assemblage of heroes, glorious without the appendage of pomp, great in their noble simplicity, exalted by

their actions. The restorer of the monarchy of England came first; the badge of his sacred destination was conspicuous on his arm; superior majesty distinguished his person, while benignity shone in his aspect. His chaste spouse rode by his side, fearing no peril in his society, and, in his absence, insensible of every pleasure. Pardon me, lady, if I digress in admiration of this illustrious and faithful pair. Many a hero followed, willing to forfeit their lives, so they might tear down the crescent, and rescue that land from the pollution of infidels, which had been hallowed by the footsteps of their Divine Master. But nearest the Prince, in rank as in virtue, rode he who became lord of my hand and fortune, Henry Plantagenet."

Alicia, interrupting, exclaimed,—"The young Prince, whom England so long and deeply bewailed, whose untimely death

sent his father, broken-hearted, to the grave !”

“ The same,” resumed Lady Emmeline, as a tear silently stole down her withered cheek. “ And was he the husband you deplore ?” inquired the Countess of Lancaster. “ I have survived him nearly fifty years,” returned the aged abbess, “ not only to know that the world cannot supply his loss, but (oh grief most insupportable, save by the aids of religion !) to know that I was the cause of his premature death.”

These exclamations diverted Alicia’s mind from the sympathy which the abbess’s narrative excited, and refixed it on her own calamities. She started, and exclaimed, — “ That conviction may be supported.” “ Grace,” replied the abbess, “ is powerful, though faithful love is weak.” “ Faithful love,” replied Alicia, “ could not endure such a reflection ; but Lancaster never loved, or would he, in one little

year, forget the woman he believes he has murdered?"

The word was spoken ; Alicia would have given worlds to have recalled it ; but recollection came too late. It was, however, intrusted to secrecy and honour, and necessarily led to a full disclosure of all her afflictions. But extenuating affection, while it aggravated her own previous provocations, suggested the possibility, that her husband might not intend her destruction. On weighing every circumstance, Lady Emmeline corroborated that hope. Still the conviction, that Lancaster never loved her, was painfully imprinted on Alicia's mind ; he must, at least, suppose that the cup he had given her caused her death, and would not affection have taught him to devote a longer period to the memory of the terrified wretch, who clasped his knees, and sued for mercy ? Her innocent boy, too, — so soon to be reconciled to the loss of so endearing an

infant! — to become a thriving wooer, and lead, with smiles, a gay bride to the altar over the grave of his wife and his son! Alicia sobbed aloud, wept, and prayed for patience: then, with mingled self-reproof and jealous pique, added, — “ But it was just that I should be made to feel how love lingers in the house of death. How often, while my levity led me to neglect Matilda’s sorrows, have I said, ‘ She weeps too much for Beauchamp. Did she expect her lover should be exempt from the common lot of mortality?’ Matilda’s tears are now dried, and no wonder — when Lancaster turns comforter, who can weep?”

Even the candour and caution of Lady Emmeline, added to the veneration which she had imbibed for the pious patriot, did not prevent her from owning, that the precipitancy of this second marriage involved his conduct in a cloud of suspicion, from which she could only exonerate him

by supposing that he sacrificed every feeling to the desire of perpetuating his name and race. The frankness of Alicia's confession, her zeal to justify Lancaster, and the humility of her self-accusation, had all the effect which such conduct is likely to produce on an intelligent and liberal mind, too well acquainted with human nature to give credence to the partial portraits of those, who, while they blacken their opponent with the deepest tinge of depravity, envelope their own actions in the sunny blaze of innocence. That Alicia had deserved reproof, was plain; that she also deserved forgiveness, affection and most endeared remembrance, was still more evident. Surely, the character given of the Earl of Lancaster's implacability by his enemies must be just, namely, that if any one offended him, he slew him in his wrath.

But, ere this decision was finally adopted, Lady Emmeline determined to hear from Father Nicholas those minute parti-

culars to which Alicia's agony prevented her attending. The good monk lingered in the precincts of Kirklee, affectionately attached to the munificent Earl of Lincoln's daughter. Lady Emmeline required him faithfully to relate all the intelligence he had received.

He first sought the Earl of Lancaster at Canford. There, no doubt was entertained of the Countess's death; since then, the Earl had not been at the castle. The servants heard of his being dangerously sick; and some remarked it was from grief, while others said that, as he and the Countess were not happy, this was impossible. Young Sir Edmund, and one of the attendant ladies, went away on the night of the funeral; they concluded he was sent to some other abode; but it was since supposed that he was dead; for the Earl had been heard to exclaim, that the same sad day made him childless and a widower. No household was kept

at Canford; the neighbouring peasants were ignorant; and the knights were attending their Lord, who they believed was on his way to meet the King.

From Canford, Father Nicholas proceeded to the Savoy palace, but neither the King nor Lancaster were in London. The former, roused by the insupportable misery of the kingdom, again talked of assembling an army to oppose Bruce, and it was hoped Lancaster would join him, for it was reported that they were reconciled. The pilgrim monk, therefore, determined to return northward; but taking Kenilworth in his way, he was surprised to hear that the Earl of Lancaster was there, and that it was a scene of nuptial rejoicing. He saw the bride arrive from Amesbury with a magnificent train, and heard that she was the wealthy heiress of Earl Maurice, once betrothed to Guy de Beauchamp. He endeavoured to get at the speech of the bridegroom,

and sent word, that he had most important intelligence to communicate, but he could gain no audience. He watched the castle-gate ; but once, when he had got near, he was pushed back by a crowd of suppliants, through which he was too feeble to force his way. He then accosted Sir Robert Holland, to whom, as a last resource, he intrusted the fact of Lady Alicia's being alive ; but instead of the information exciting surprize or joy, Holland sternly answered, that the news was stale, and the meanest serving-man in the castle knew it to have hastened these auspicious nuptials. " Hark thee, vile agent of a base impostor," continued the knight, " I this once, in pity to thy white hairs, and the cowl I suspect thou hast stolen, will keep the lash from thy shoulders ; but let not thy face be any more seen on the Lord Lancaster's demesnes, lest I stretch thee on the rack, and force thee to discover what thou knowest of that treason."

“ I attempted to remonstrate,” said Nicholas, pursuing his narrative, “ when he grasped my shoulder, and gave me in charge to a sturdy yeoman ; and surely I had been thrown into a dungeon, had not the bride passed me at that moment, and commanded that I should be set free whatever were my offences, saying no one should weep on the day she rejoiced, especially a church-man.”

“ Mysterious all, and inexplicable,” said Lady Emmeline ; “ but you saw the Earl of Lancaster. How looked he ? ” “ Very pale and solemn.” “ That was not a bridegroom’s cast of countenance.” “ True,” replied the monk, “ but he was gaily attired ; and though I used my liberty to escape hastily from his demesne, ere I passed the bounds of the park I heard the bridal peal, and saw flags hoisted on every turret of the castle ; crowds of peasants met me in their holiday garb, the

trees were dressed with garlands, and every tongue blessed the noble pair."

"It is enough," returned the abbess, dismissing Nicholas; "incredulity must rest content with this full damning proof. How can history present us with just portraits, when frail and finite man holds the pencil? Shall Lancaster be chronicled as a saint and a hero, and shall shame be the portion of his far less faulty wife? Yet thus it must ever be, when those who cannot discover motives, are called to describe actions. Modest virtue and silent innocence seek oblivion, while art and villainy, borrowing the garb of honesty, circle their bold frontlets with an halo of glory." "Much injured lady," said she to the Countess, "be just to thy fame, and disabuse posterity. Avow thy wrongs; seek the king; accuse Lancaster of conspiring thy death, and disabuse posterity." "Never," returned the faithful wife, so

“ help me, Heaven ! Never, never, never ! Lancaster may abjure me, hate me, load my memory with infamy, but I never will accuse him. The sons of Matilda may be Earls of Lincoln and Salisbury, I will not dispute their rights, nor claim my paternal lands ; I have done with the world for ever. Here, where I first discovered the important uses of life, I will pass the remainder of my sad probation. Here, where many a gentle breast throbs with pity for my woes, will I lay me down in peace, knowing that the flowers which strew my grave will be moistened with tears of affection. Do not, most kind lady, refuse the sanctuary of your holy walls to a forlorn outcast, whose life is a curse to him she best loves. Soft ! there is mortal agony in that thought ; — O help to ward it from my cold heart ! Lend me your experience, your wisdom, venerated mother ! Talk to me of the strange events that you have seen. Did

no perplexed chain of circumstances occur in your Piedmontese valleys, or at the Sicilian court, that may justify a belief, or even a hope, or say only a bare possibility, that Lancaster has not been wholly a deceiver; that he did not intend to destroy me; that he is not now exulting in the success of his scheme? Let him be prejudiced, misled, seduced; any thing but such a being, who, while his deeds confirm the depravity of his species, I can never desire, nor expect to rejoin in time or in eternity."

CHAPTER XXX.

Unequal task ! a passion to resign,
 For hearts so touch'd, so pierc'd, so lost as mine.
 Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,
 How often must it love, how often hate !
 How often hope, despair, resent, regret,
 Conceal, disdain, do all things but forget !

POPE.

THOUGH neither resentment nor revenge could find admission into Alicia's affectionate and flexible character, in one instance that character seemed to have acquired stability, for grief was her constant, we may say her cherished guest. Like all those often envied but pitiable beings, whose youth has been distinguished by an extraordinary degree of parental indulgence, which, while it deepens the acuteness of their sensibility to feel neglect and unkindness, deprives

them of fortitude to encounter sorrow, and patience to endure it, she came to her severe trials as a naked infant, shipwrecked on a rocky coast, dashed to and fro by furious breakers. No sooner did Lady Emmeline fully appreciate her character, than with affection for its susceptibility, and pity for its weakness, she yielded to her desire of taking the veil, considering her as one of those who, being environed with trials to which their strength is unequal, may allowably, even in the morning of life, enter that quiescent state, which the laws of society in general only permit to the tired, debilitated labourer, on whom the sun of existence is going down. The path, wherein a firm and equable mind might walk, was to her impracticable; and even supposing grief should yield to time, and some new object again revive her tender affections, so as to tempt her return to the world, was there not cause to fear, that the

ardency of her feelings might again drive her on the rocks which had before destroyed her peace. No qualities are so unsuited to eminent rank and extensive relations, as acute sensibility and an indulged habit of brooding over cureless woes.

After having determined on taking the veil, Alicia had no difficulty in choosing the place of her retreat. Amesbury, indeed, still contained her aged mother, and the illustrious relative of her husband, the Princess Mary ; but to neither of these persons could she make herself known, without discovering what she wished for ever to conceal — the story of her conjugal misery. That magnificent and royally endowed pile had also once sheltered the temporary woes of Matilda, but the charity which Alicia so largely exercised toward her husband did not extend to that lady. Self-love had not so totally subsided as to make her allow

that the heart of Lancaster could have been alienated by any superior claim of affection, beauty, or desert. Matilda was discreet, diffident, reserved. Hypocrisy all ! The quickness of Alicia's feelings, equally alive to tenderness and dislike, preserved their native irritability when the image of this lady was presented to her remembrance ; and the bare walls of her cell, or the spare table of the refectory, were never truly mortifications, unless her thoughts, glancing from cloister scenery, fixed on the daughter of Earl Maurice, the secretly-beloved of Lancaster's soul, (for whom she had been nefariously removed,) sitting in bridal pomp in royal Kenilworth. Perhaps there are few female hearts who will not conceive this lapse of envy to be pardonable, when it is added that her mind's eye also painted Lancaster at her side, exulting in the happier choice of his matured judgment. Hastily (for that way madness lay) she

withdrew her thoughts from this train, and endeavoured to fix them on other objects, by gazing on the pinnacles of Kirklee. “ Dear humble roof,” said she, “ whose deep repose has never been prophaned by the presence of that artful lady, who now usurps my state and happiness, though, unlike lofty Amesbury, no queen or princess ever found your aisles the lower courts of heaven, your dark cloisters and embowered groves have not been soiled by the footsteps of her, who, wearing sorrow as a becoming garb, meditated an invasion of my rights. Her voice has never joined in your anthems; those limes never screened her from the sun, as she wandered in her bridal musings. There, then, I may walk and think of Lancaster. No, I must think of him no more, for he is the husband of another. Be it so. Yet, hospitable Kirklee, seat of true piety and generous pity, my sanctuary and my

tomb, a grateful refugee shall make your asylum yet more inviting to future mourners! My amusement shall be to decorate your chapel with every curious ornament my taste or skill can devise." Here quickly-glancing memory recalled to her thought the airy attire and light carol of the wood-nymph, which had raised Lancaster's anger to its climax, and sealed her own doom. Would the sober grey of her present habit expiate the guilt of that rebellious levity? The weeping novice dropt upon her knees, kissed her crucifix, and exchanged vain retrospection for salutary prayer.

Thus, while struggling with human passions, tempted but not ensnared, neither a victor nor a captive but a militant combatant, the lovely votaress held on her heaven-ward course, Lady Emmeline, and her gentle daughters persevered in the kind offices of sympathy and instruction. The former could call to mind no

correspondent narrative to lighten the heavy charge of cruelty and perfidy which lay on the Earl of Lancaster, but as a tale of sorrow had strong attractions, she again resumed the history of her own life.

“ The behaviour of the English princes at the court of Sicily,” said she, “ soon made it apparent that being the wife of Montford would not have given me a claim to their favour. Of all the nobles who were presented to Prince Edward, Guido alone was received with cold and distant attention ; King Charles remarked this forced civility, so different from his wonted behaviour, which, though majestic, was gracious.” ‘ Your noble kinsman,’ said the King, ‘ is one of my best and truest knights.’ ‘ I honour the true knights of the hospitable monarch who regales me in his palace,’ answered the hero ; and, stepping by Montford, took the hand of

an Apulian baron who had served under his banner in Gascony.

“ There were revellings and maskings at court in honour of the strangers. The free manners which a French sovereign had introduced, allowed me to be present at these, though the custom of Italy granted that privilege to matrons only. In the course of the evening, I was selected to dance with Prince Henry, after which he continued to converse with me, asking if I could shew him the unfortunate beauty who was affianced to Guido de Montford. My heart trembled at the expression, but I truly answered, she is not present. The Prince looked incredulous : I rightly suspected that he had been told who I was. ‘ Perhaps,’ said he, ‘ she is preparing her nuptial chaplet ; but, if you know the lovely victim, tell her Henry Plantagenet advises her to make it of cypress.’ ‘ Does any peril, then,’ said I, ‘ threaten

the Count de Montford?' 'No other,' replied the Prince, 'than what awaits every other villain.'

"I returned with increased abhorrence of my proposed spouse, and,—why should I affect an exemption from the feelings of my sex and age?—with dawning affection for him who seemed thus interested in my fate. All the Queen's ladies were loud in praising the English princes, as faultless models of grace and beauty. The one in the prime of manhood, tall, dignified, and commanding even in his urbanity; the other in the flower of youth, gay, insinuating and lovely. The retrospection of a life enveloped in the clouds of sorrow, gives a sunny lustre to the remembrance of my brief days of delight. Oh, my daughter, if I had not also fondly loved, how should I have known how to pity thee!

"While, with the dangerous licence of youth, I allowed myself to frame an ima-

ginary scheme of happiness which might have been my portion, could Henry and Guido have changed their identity and their inclinations, I was roused from the dreams of fiction to endure and console real distress. The Queen had discovered, by means of her confessor, who was a Dominican, that my father had certainly perished, and she no longer allowed us to be cheated by false hopes, or that I should be sacrificed to obtain what was beyond mortal power to bestow. She knew our reluctance to the marriage, and that my consent was only won by the promise of my father's life and freedom, and, as she had proposed the match from friendship to us, she took upon herself the responsibility of dissolving it. Knowing Guido's malicious temper and influence with the King, address was necessary. She prevailed that he should be appointed ambassador to the holy see, and then declared that her affection would not permit

her to give up my society. Montford claimed his contract ; the Queen replied that it was conditional, depending upon an engagement which he had not fulfilled, — the *Sieur Manfred's* liberty. *Gúido* insisted that his exertions for that purpose had been sincere and strenuous, and he argued the injustice of his resigning the woman of his heart, and forfeiting the reward of his services, by an event common to mortality, and which human skill could neither obviate nor retard. ‘ Surely,’ he added, ‘ being thus deprived of a father’s care, makes the protection of a husband more requisite to the *Lady Emmeline*.’ The Queen insisted that whatever might be my future determination, my first sorrows should not be interrupted. Could the visits of an accepted lover, he asked, be an intrusion ? The Queen replied, that the circumstances of the *Sieur Manfred's* death recalled to the memory of his family events, which made

the name of Montford painful. Guido bowed, and said he understood her. As an agent to save an heretical brand from burning, he might be useful, but an excommunicated race could not forgive his descent from a blessed saint and martyr, who lost his life in endeavouring to gather them into the true fold. ‘ With such sentiments,’ rejoined the Queen, ‘ surely, Count Montford, it would be wise in you to withdraw your pretensions to a lady, whom you seem to think contaminated by the misfortunes of her ancestors.’ ‘ It would have been wiser, Madam,’ he replied, ‘ had I never placed them there ; but my suit is avowed, my pretensions are public, honour and Christian charity alike bind me to perseverance. I must marry Lady Emmeline, as the means of reconciling her to the church ; and woe to the presumptuous gallant who disputes my pretensions !’

“ With this threat he set out for Rome,

only yielding, at the Queen's persuasions, his design of visiting me before his departure. The first time I quitted the chamber of mourning, was to pay my duty to my royal patroness. The Princess of England was with her. My grief for my father's death was too extreme to be restrained by the presence of royalty. The heart of Eleanora was the seat of all the domestic virtues ; she inquired why I wept, and attempted to console me. The Queen announced my lineage and history ; and repeating the conversation she had held with Guido, expressed her fears of his revengeful temper ; from the effects of which, if it took one direction, even her interference could not save me, since the power of the inquisition in Italy predominated over that of sovereigns. Never shall I forget the benign look Eleanora cast upon me, as she offered to save me from the peril which hung over me. A lady maternally allied to her spouse should

not, she said, be dragged to the altar, a victim to the malice of a premeditating tyrant. She described the conduct of the house of Montford in England, the baseness with which the father of Guido had seduced the sister of the King, and thus induced a necessity for consenting to his marriage to her, as a salvo for her honour ; the cruelty with which he ever treated her, his vile ingratitude to his royal brother and munificent patron, his repeated rebellions, and brutal insolence to the King and his son, after he had taken them prisoners ; and, finally, his aspiring to the crown, which induced the barons to desert him, and roused the dormant loyalty of the Earl of Gloucester, to free Prince Edward, her husband, who, at Evesham, defeated and slew the traitor, and reinstated King Henry on his throne. Of Guido, she would say no more than that he was a son truly worthy such a father.

“ After this detail, the Princess proposed to save me from so determined and unworthy a lover, by taking me with her to Palestine. With joy I embraced her offer ; and my mother’s fears for my life overcoming her regret at parting with me, I was privately removed to the galley, after receiving from the mother of whom I was the only solace, her blessing and a parting embrace ; its pressure I still seem to feel : it was the last, as well as the dearest ! These hands were not permitted to close the eyes of either of my parents. You weep, lady, and tell your beads. It is a painful duty ; but, like every other offering which we pay to virtuous sensibility, it has its reward.”

The abbess paused, pitying Alicia’s emotion, but ignorant of the self-accusation with which it was accompanied. After a mental supplication for forgiveness, the Countess intreated Lady Emmeline to proceed.

“ The counsellors of Prince Edward objected to his receiving the affianced wife of Montford into his protection, urging the danger of his again embroiling his family with that turbulent house ; but Eleanora told my history, and Henry pleaded his mother’s descent from the house of Provence. ‘ Surely,’ said he, ‘ we shall in nothing offend against our character as Christian knights, by extending our aid to our unfriended kinswoman, whom a baptized Saracen wishes to enthrall in the most cruel bondage. You, Sir,’ addressing himself to Prince Edward, “ cannot have forgotten the indignities you suffered when Guido was made your warder, and insulted your captivity. Nor have I forgiven his committing the honour of my father, who, moved by his clemency to act as mediator between the King and the captive Montfords, procured for them not only the lives which they had forfeited by treason,

but also the assurance of a pension, on condition of their surrendering their castles, and quitting the kingdom. The grace being obtained, the grant signed, and the prisoners freed, their adherents, with equivocating baseness, retained the strong holds; while Guido and his brothers visited the continental courts, everywhere blackening the English name, and trying to raise troops to create fresh commotions in that country, whose mercy they experienced instead of its justice. He who breaks his oath with man will not keep it with woman. I will not wound the chaste ear of your princess, by dwelling on the gross vices of that stickler for religious purity; suffice it to say, that we are called to rejoice that this rose of Provence is happily rescued from his grasp. For myself, by the sword of knighthood, which I received from King Henry, I swear to be the

Lady Emmeline's champion, and to defend her from a suitor, who woos with threats, and terrifies his victim to his arms.'

" I was soon informed of Prince Henry's interference in my favour ; and gratitude, increasing my admiration, confirmed my love. That quick-sighted passion soon communicated our mutual affection to each other ; and ere we reached the Holy Land, our eyes had exchanged vows of fidelity. During our voyage, we conversed much together ; poetry and music were our themes, the soul-entrancing offspring of the rich happy valleys, where my enlightened ancestors patronized the liberal arts. Prince Henry knew many of the most celebrated troubadours ; he had heard their adventures, and could recite their songs. We often passed the night on deck, while the moon looked from a cloudless sky on

a calm sea, reflecting only the azure firmament of heaven. Then, while the Princess and her ladies touched their lutes in soft cadence, Prince Henry's mellow voice caroled those strains which inspired the tenderness they described. But soon did earthly passions yield to sublimer feelings: The watcher at the mast-head discerned the coast of Palestine; instantly every ornament of attire was laid aside, and the Prince and the galley-slave, alike disclaiming all sublunary distinctions in the general character of sinners acknowledging the mercies of redemption, sunk upon their knees, confessed their transgressions, and received absolution. The priests then began to chaunt the litanies, in which every mariner joined, as well as in the triumphant *Te Deum*, which followed those exercises of humility. Thus we entered the port of Joppa, where, prostrating themselves on the earth, all the pilgrims, as they kissed the hallowed soil,

believed their offences pardoned, and the gates of heaven opened for their reception.

“ We continued to rejoice, but care and sorrow clouded the brow of our princely leader. In vain did he seek in the harbour for the ships of the King of France, his brother-crusader, on whose co-operation his hopes of planting the cross on the walls of Solyma entirely depended. He was soon met by a pursuivant, not sent to inform him that the pious monarch had made another port, but to communicate most disastrous news. The climate of Africa had withered the flower of Christendom. The French forces had wintered at Tunis ; a pestilence had broken out in the camp, which had not only buried in those sandy plains many a bold and pious knight, who ardently panted for glorious enterprize, but the King himself, the gem and star of Europe, alike renowned for his piety to God, and his fidelity to man. Still

more destructive was it to the hopes of Prince Edward, to be informed that the son of Saint Louis, Philip Augustus, more intent to wrest an earthly crown from others than to secure an eternal one, on the death of his father renounced the crusade, and immediately returned with his forces to France. The envy and hatred which he had ever borne to the English prince, justified the presumption that he designed to surprize Guienne and Gascony, which, by marriage or descent, had long been fiefs of the crown of England.

“A council was immediately summoned; and many of the nobles, trembling for the fate of these valuable possessions, advised that the army should return to Europe. It was stated that, thus deserted, the force of England was too small to hope for success by human means, and it was presumptuous to expect miracles. Strong alike in courage and in faith, Edward rejected

these timid councils. He urged the contempt which the infidels would feel for Christendom, if England, imitating the example of France, lowered the cross to the crescent, and preferred temporal views or cold caution, to those fearless resolves and that chivalrous contempt of danger, which had once led Cœur de Lion into the heart of Palestine. Never should it be said, that one who boasted consanguinity with that hero faltered at the threshold, after having boasted that he would follow his steps. Overhearing some of his knights debate about re-imbarking their equipage, he smote his breast in anguish, and swore he would relieve beleaguered Acre, though only accompanied by his faithful esquire.

“ At this instant was plainly seen the policy of decisive behaviour, and the influence of true courage. Though success seemed hopeless, when their Prince advanced his banner, not an Englishman

would retreat. I see them now bending forward on their spears, the colour alternately flushing and fading in their cheeks, casting questioning glances on each other, that seemed to say, ‘Death lies in ambush beyond those palm-trees, but the son of our King shall not be his only victim.’ While the remembrance of distant ties and all the feelings of fraternal and filial relations struggled in their bosoms with heroic ardour and generous shame, Eleanora, whom her admiring husband permitted to be present at his councils, first rose, and, wrapping her mantle around her, pointed to Acre with a smile of calm fortitude, signifying her willingness immediately to accompany her lord. It seemed as if the barons instantly forgot those absent consorts and the dear offspring, which but a moment before drew their regrets to England, in admiration of the generous Princess. Thy father, lady, was the first who spoke. Adopt-

ing the words Eleanora had formerly used, he exclaimed, — ‘ The way to heaven is nearer from Palestine than from England !’ Not a man deserted, many peers of the endangered provinces were present, but individual interests were forgotten. They would leave their estates, they said, to the care of Providence and all faithful Christians, while they marched to overthrow the Soldan of Jaffa.

“ But when this fervour somewhat abated, Edward saw that duty required him not to abandon his brave Gascons. He knew their fidelity, and only feared lest surprize or treachery might throw them into the power of Philip. To apprize the governors of the cities of their danger, and prepare his subjects to maintain their rights, it was necessary that some illustrious and honourable captain should be dispatched, capable of confidentially communicating the apprehensions of the Prince, and of supporting by his per-

sonal worth the dignity of his government. For this purpose Edward selected his cousin Henry, the endeared friend of his privacies, and the reflex of his virtues. Flattering and honourable as was this commission, Henry regretted that it would prevent him from partaking the glorious danger of his beloved commander ; and he inquired if he were deemed unworthy to die with him, a champion of the cross. ‘ We shall meet in heaven !’ said Edward. In heaven they have now met ; but never more on earth did these illustrious friends exchange the embrace of affection ! Yet shortsighted mortals, who witnessed their separation, misjudged the lot of him to whom they supposed length of days would be awarded.

“ While the galley waited a gale to waft Prince Henry back to Europe, he told his royal kinsman that he had a boon to ask.

‘ I have given thee full powers,’ returned the other, ‘ to act as my delegate at Bourdeaux, with equal authority and dignity as myself.’ ‘ Have you not found,’ said Henry, smiling, and looking alternately at the Princess Eleanora and at me, ‘ that the chair of state is lonely without a partner?’ Edward understood the allusion, and observed that a dragon guarded the fruit of that fair garden. My gallant lover replied, — ‘ When the Lady Emmeline permitted me to vindicate her freedom, that dragon wasted to a spectre. I have served my probation as her knight, and I now crave to protect her return to Europe in the dearer character of her husband.’

“ ‘ Fair rose of Provence,’ said Prince Edward to me, ‘ sprung from a house twice allied to that of Plantagenet by happy marriages, welcome to a nation which, like its patron saint, is pledged to

defend the rights of beauty, and then to claim it as their reward.' As he spoke, he gave my yielded hand to Henry ; and, leading us to the Princess, asked her to accompany me to the altar. That day Archbishop Theobald pronounced the nuptial benediction. The next we sailed for Italy, it being Edward's wish to procure the Pope's anathema against the pretensions of Philip to the English provinces, and to denounce him a deserter of the Christian cause.

“ After a short and prosperous voyage, we landed in the papal territories, where Prince Henry's own deserts, added to those of his kinsman, whose commission he bore, ensured to him every mark of attention and honour. At all the towns through which we passed, he was received as the champion of the cross ; and our journey was expedited by every convenience that could conduce to our comfort. Prosperity and security were to me new condi-

tions of life ; and, like a long encaged bird just liberated, as I spread my wings to the sun, I shivered beneath his beams. The honours which the holy see bestowed on the Prince my husband could not efface the recollection, that, from the same tribunal, issued those decrees which had overwhelmed my ancestors. Even when he returned from an audience with the Pontiff, graced by his benedictions, I trembled ; for he carelessly named Guido de Montford among the nobles who were assembled in the Vatican palace. Instantly the idea of that man's dark eye and ferocious countenance were presented to my mind, and I inquired how he looked. 'Nothing but my confidence in my Emeline,' said Henry, gaily, ' can prevent my jealousy, when she is thus inquisitive respecting the health and comeliness of my rival. Shall I gratify the pride of beauty by saying he looked as I should have looked had you been his wife?' 'Trifler,

away!’ replied I; ‘sport not with my fears; you never could look like Montford.’ ‘Why fears my love?’ returned Henry, tenderly drying my tears. ‘Wear the happy colour of my fortunes when I tell thee, that I am reconciled to the house of Montford, and have grasped the hand of Guido in friendship. He declares he rejoices at our marriage, and sends to thee, with his cordial remembrances, a wish that thy days may be long and thy love for me fervent and eternal. He has promised, too, that when I am arrived at Bourdeaux, he will join me, and be the champion for the house of Anjou against the claims of France. Look not incredulous. Canst thou doubt the power of Omniscience to change the nature of his creatures?’ I was silent, unconvinced; but not knowing what to reply, I did not penetrate into the meaning of the equivocating traitor’s enigmatical expressions, though still disbelieving

that the Ethiop's skin could have undergone this sudden transformation.

“ We reached Viterbo in our way to France, where my lord proposed attending mass. It was, he said, a token of gratitude, required by the domestic happiness with which Heaven had blessed him. An undefined foreboding chilled my heart, as I said, ‘ Will you go in your public character ?’ ‘ How,’ said he, ‘ should Henry Plantagenet offer his oblations, but as thy husband, and viceroy of the Prince of England ?’ I told him that I had seen a man in a vizard pass us on the road, whose air and figure reminded me of Montford. ‘ The soil of Viterbo,’ replied the generous Prince, ‘ is as free to him as to us. What, if he kneels beside me at the altar ! Our reconciliation will prevent his presence from vitiating my gift. Are you too implacable to accompany me to the earthly tabernacle of the Prince of Peace, lest you should meet your enemy there ?’

Surely you would not bar against him the gates of heaven.' I followed him, requesting that he would thenceforth be a truer interpreter of a heart where love struggled with fear, instead of warring with hatred.

“ We prostrated ourselves at the altar where the Bishop had commenced the mysterious preparation. I looked at my beloved lord : never had love and joy a sublimer expression than that which his countenance disclosed. Preparatory to receiving the consecrated wafer, he offered his intercessory prayers for his father, his country, his brave compatriots in Palestine, and all mankind, even for his enemies, if he had yet an enemy. Then, clasping my hands, he added,— ‘ I also thank the Giver of all good for this blessing, to which his wisdom directed my choice.’ He started as he spoke, gave a groan, and reclined on my shoulder. I did not ask the cause ; for, turning round, I saw an

assassin's arm withdrawing a dagger from his body. The figure was muffled in a cloak ; but through the vizard I knew the peculiarly horrid expression of Guido's eyes. My husband spoke not, moved not, breathed not. The murderer had leisure to take a deadly aim, and the blow was given by ferocious strength and interminable hatred. You weep, dearest daughter ; I have wept for fifty years ; but not without consolation. In the most solemn act of peace and reconciliation, his spirit was called to that state where existence is not measured by the rotations of time, days and years ; manhood and age are lost in that continuity and freshness of being, which is the reward of virtue and piety. There rests my Henry, among the full of days ; and the period of our separation will seem but as a moment, when reckoned among the ages of our re-union.

“ Let me briefly tell the remainder of my story :— Montford sprang upon the altar, and claimed its protection. He had the effrontery to avow himself Henry’s murderer, or, as he called it, the avenger of his father and brother slain at the battle of Evesham. Alas ! my lord was not in the field where they died. They fell, upholding the banner of rebellion ; and the princely arm which punished their treasons, restored a crown to his father, and peace to his country. It was the insatiable spirit of revenge ; the madness of disappointed desire ; satanic pride coupled with satanic envy, aspiring to the rewards of desert, without a soul to estimate the value of those qualities which secure esteem : these vices, and not the misdirected impulse of filial affection, were the deadly cankers which blasted my bridal felicity.

“ In the first frenzy of my despair, I called on heaven and earth to punish

perfidious Montford. Apparently I called in vain. No lightnings descended from above; nor did the earth engulf him living in her womb. But he whose punishments are commensurate with eternity, need not commence them during the duration of time. Not so his earthly representatives, bounded in their power, and finite as to its duration; the sword of justice is not put into their hands that it should rust in its scabbard when favour bids, or flash destruction at the call of private passions. Say not that I wander from the fold of the church, nor do I wish you to plead the partial feelings of conjugal sorrow in extenuation of my vehemence, when I add, that the keeper of the apostolical keys must account at the bar of the Almighty for his abrogation of the Divine law, which requires the blood of the murderer from the hand of the magistrate. Did he refer to the services of the house of Montford, as a reason why his

eye pitied Guido? — Those services were crimes. The blood-stained valleys of Provence, her once happy villages now silent catacombs, and her cities lighted by the fires of persecution, attest how the house of Montford served the God of mercy.

“ O, my daughter, were we sent into the world only to seek our own, and not the things of others, many reasons could not be urged against an early preference of that monastic life, where the vicissitudes of fortune are unknown; where hope never betrays, and fear never alarms. Had I been covered with the thick veil of the Carthusian sisterhood, these eyes would never have beheld the form which still visits my slumbers, and often withdraws my thoughts from the calm ecstasies of devotion, to recollect how I entered Viterbo, and how I quitted its detested walls, after finding all my cries for justice disregarded. I came a happy bride, rid-

ing by the side of the most amiable and beloved of men, elated by the acclamations of an admiring multitude, and anticipating the happy years which their prayers invoked : I departed a solitary widow, following that husband's ghastly corpse, which it was now my sad duty to lay at the feet of his most affectionate father. I did so, after long and painful travel ; I meant that should be the last of my earthly duties ; but the deep affliction of the excellent old Prince kept me awhile from the house of peace. He said it was a consolation to talk with me of his Henry, and to see that the noble youth was deplored by an affection sincere as his own. The King of the Romans, whose gentle virtues endeared him to every heart, died in these arms ; and I fulfilled his last request, of depositing the golden cup, containing the treasure he most prized, in the cathedral of Saint Peter's at Westminster.

Ask not, lady, if it were the regalia of his titular kingdom, the coronet of his English earldom, or the heir-looms of Angoulême and Anjou. It was a jewel worthy the holiest shrine — a heart perforated by an assassin's sword, while glowing with the purest fervours of social and divine love!

“ Since that period, the sequel of my history is comprized in this sentence — I took the veil in this convent. But to thee, daughter, whom affliction has also early dismissed from the duties of society, the history of my feelings may be instructive. For a time my heart was rebellious. To reign the vice-queen of Bourdeaux, or to smile a happy princess at the court of England, seemed better than to weep a forgotten nun at sequestered Kirklee. Long and deep reflection on the brevity and unsatisfactoriness of human enjoyments, added to a soul-satisfying conviction of the goodness and

wisdom of my Creator, have reconciled me to my lot. Time and eternity divide our existence. What prepares me for the next life, is best for me in the present ; and so truly am I reconciled to my fate, that I sometimes doubt, whether, if I were permitted to unseal the tomb, I would revivify the mouldering form of him I shall ever love. The foundation of this peace has been laid in humility, in a renunciation of my wishes, in a self-abasing consciousness that the enjoyments which are still mine, exceed my deservings. How truly are those our worst enemies who by flattery increase our pride, or by indulgence aggravate our desires. They tell us the world was made for us, and that all things ought to bend to our will. Fools ! 'tis the short-sighted importance of an emmet, who from a mole-hill surveys his space of empire ; but sees not the approaching bird, who

seizes and carries him to her hungry nestlings.”

“ Surely,” said the Countess of Lancaster, “ I now am humble; yet help me, excellent Lady Emmeline, to probe and purify my heart, by describing to me the convictions of true humility.”

“ When others,” replied the abbess, “ have their desires, and thou not thine; when the sayings of another are esteemed, thine slighted; others ask and obtain, thou beggest, and art refused; they are cried up, thou disgraced; and while they are employed, thou art laid by as fit for nothing; or an unworthy person commands thee, and rules thee as a tyrant, reproves, suspects, and reviles thee: canst thou bear this sweetly, and entertain the usage as thy just portion, and as an accident most fit and proper to thy person and condition?”*

* This most admirable definition of humility, taken from the eloquent Bishop Taylor, is experi-

Alicia recollected her thoughts, and then said, she trusted she felt this lowliness of mind. "If so," answered the abbess, "affliction has done its work, and either brighter days will ensue, or its deep gloom will be as acceptable as sunshine. But perhaps at the present moment temptation may be inert and feeble. 'Tis dangerous to decide an important question by the state of our immediate feelings. We will at a future time proceed in the important scrutiny ; till then, frequently examine thy soul by the test of a definition which the children of affliction ought to have engraven deeply on their memories. At the same time remembering, that it does not require a surrender of judgment so absolute as to hold ourselves worse than those whose defects and palpable unworthiness we

mentally recommended to the daily consideration of all whose condition it may suit.

plainly see, through the gauds of their better fortunes ; but only the submission of our desires to the will of God, testified by contentedly embracing the portion he sees most fitting for us."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Neither man nor angel can discern
 Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
 Invisible, except to God alone,
 By his permissive will, through Heaven and earth :
 And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
 At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
 Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
 Where no ill seems.

MILTON.

THE first month of Alicia's noviciate had not expired, when the repose of Kirklee was interrupted by an unexpected visitant. The suite of a great lady was passing to one of her residences where she herself had already arrived; and the hostels and castles were so deserted that only convents could supply to travellers the rites of hospitality. The communications of the pursuivant, who asked this favour of Lady Emmeline, were calculated to put the humility of Alicia to the severest test, for he declared that he was

a servant of the Countess of Lancaster. Alicia, when the request was made, was with the abbess, who, pitying her feelings, objected to admitting the stranger. “No,” exclaimed the pensive novice, “dear and indulgent mother, let me not render you inhospitable. Receive the petitioners; they may be some who were my servants. I will confine myself to my cell, and practise the lessons you have taught me, while you entertain them. But in pity to the bereaved mother and deserted wife, — in recollection too of that Henry who haunts your night visions, and interrupts your prayers, — enquire if they have heard any tidings of my child, and if Lancaster is happy with his Matilda?”

The tender, considerate Lady Emmeline did not long leave Alicia to weep and tremble alone; but soon withdrew from the refectory, and joined her in her cell. “My daughter,” said she, “this is most extraordinary; the tidings brought by

Father Nicholas, and the account of the damsel whom we lodge, cannot accord. Unquestionably she belongs to the household of the Earl of Lancaster, for she is escorted by horsemen, bearing his badge and pennon; yet she knows of no Lady Matilda, wife of Earl Thomas; but speaks of Alicia de Lacy as still alive."

Imagine the sailor who has long clung to the wreck of his shattered vessel: it bursts from his enervated arms; he bids an eternal adieu to all sublunary objects; and, just as he expects his closing eyes will open in an unknown world, he sees the life-boat riding the waves to snatch him from destruction: the revived ties of nature warm his heart, and rekindle the wish to struggle with his fate till rescue arrives. So felt the Countess of Lancaster. The repose of the monastery, the friendship of the nuns, the counsels of the holy abbess, even her approaching espousals to an heavenly husband, all lost

their attractions ; and as her long-tortured thoughts disjoined the names of Lancaster and Matilda, the tide of human affections rushed into her bosom. Awhile she panted for breath, beseeching Lady Emmeline to pardon her weakness, and then asked the name of their inmate. It was Beatrice Valancy. “ The most favoured of my attendants,” exclaimed she ; “ but to whom I principally ascribed my ruin. What can this mean ? She must have discovered my retreat, and visits Kirklee under another pretext, to ascertain that I am really here. Did you, holy mother, satisfy her on that point ? Perhaps she is sent by my lord. At least you say she denies that he is Matilda’s husband.”

The abbess clasped the agitated novice in her maternal arms, and answered, that while the intelligence appeared thus inexplicable and contradictory, reserve was the discreetest course. She dissuaded her from seeing Beatrice, till some further

development had taken place. The aversion which Alicia justly felt for the venal sycophant who had corrupted her mind, struggled with the anxieties of a wife and mother. "Holy abbess," said she, "the world is dead to me, at least its amusements, its vanities, and its pursuits; but must human affections also expire to complete the triumph of the cross? The church encourages us to hope that the ties of love and friendship exist in heaven, and constitute part of its joys. It also describes the saints and the blessed martyrs in the full exercise of social kindness, assisting militant Christians in their journey to Canaan."

"I do not condemn your anxiety to know the state of your family," answered Lady Emmeline, "nor do I, dear, pious, but too susceptible daughter, enjoin that entire consumption of our affections on the altar of Divine love, in which our more rigid schoolmen place the value of

the holocaust you are about to offer ; I only require that our desires should attend on the temple, as obedient handmaids, submitted to the service of Him who sees every contingency, and will assign to each its proper station, provided we wait on His will. My advice was prudential, and merely respected your own safety, when I wished you not to see Beatrice Valancy. She neither appears as an envoy from Lord Lancaster, to treat of reconciliation, nor yet as a spy sent to discover the secrets of my nunnery. Her deportment is haughty and vain, like one of the children of this world, who, elated by a little brief prosperity, and engrossed by temporal arrangements, look on the labours of the pious votaress with contempt, and shudder with fastidious niceness at the ministering sister who is devoted to the relief of poverty and affliction. I do not wish her to know that you reside among us ;

but if you could so far command your feelings as to be a silent hearer, you shall conceal yourself in my chamber of audience; while, in the character of one allied to the house of Lancaster by marriage, I will question her of its present state."

Alicia promised with a fervency that led Lady Emmeline to fear her composure could not be equal to its performance. She however permitted the trial. The haughty Beatrice could not decline the conference to which she was invited by a person of such eminence for rank and sanctity. Gay, disdainful, and richly attired, she stalked into the chamber, where the abbess sat to receive her in simple venerable majesty. Unappalled by the arrogance of her guest, she gravely said, "Be seated, young maiden, and gratify my curiosity respecting the welfare of a family to whom I am allied; for though I have renounced the world for half a century, I cease not to pray for the princes

of the house of Anjou. You see before you, in the abbess of Kirklee, the widow of Henry Plantagenet, and a descendant of the counts of Thoulouse. When I renounced the world, Edmund of Lancaster was in the sunshine of his first espousals with the fair Avisia of Gloucester. I well recollect the reported splendor of their nuptials, for the detail gave a severe pang to my then unsubmitting heart. Blind to the future, we see not in the magnificence of the bridal pair, the approaching trials of the wife and husband ; all then is love, and hope, and exultation. Soon, too soon, in many marriages are these feelings succeeded by disgust or despondency ; a daughter sickens in the prime of beauty ; a promising son is ensnared by the temptations of the world. Fortune turns her wheel, time spreads his wings, death points the shafts of disease. Cold and pale as the white marble effigy which preserves her beautiful resemblance,

the rich heiress of the Norman Earls of Gloucester lies in the same holy edifice as contains the heart of my princely husband. A second and more auspicious marriage with the widowed Queen of Navarre made Prince Edmund the father of two hopeful sons, of whose fortunes I wish to enquire. A report has reached us, that the eldest, after his first union with the heiress of De Lacy, had been dissolved by death, has formed a second contract with the daughter of Earl Maurice, once affianced to his friend Guy de Beauchamp."

"Report," said Beatrice, "was ever a gossip and a liar; the lady you speak of is indeed adopted into the house of Lancaster, but it is by marriage with the Earl of Leicester, Prince Edmund's younger son."

"Joy to their nuptials!" resumed the abbess in a louder tone, to drown the faint expressions of relieved anguish

which burst from the heaving bosom of the secreted lady.

“ No joy nor blessing,” answered Beatrice, insolently, “ but sorrow and malediction attend them for ever ! Their nuptials were hastened to injure a most admirable lady, and to divert the princely fortunes of the De Lacies from their lawful inheritrix, my noble mistress.” “ As how ?” inquired Lady Emmeline, with unaffected solicitude. “ Princely abbess,” answered Beatrice, “ the explanation will unfold a series of unparalleled chicanery, cruelty, and injustice. On the marriage of Thomas Plantagenet with the beautiful and excellent Alicia de Lacy, her besotted father, fascinated with the saintly repute of his son-in-law, assigned his estates in perpetuity to the house of Lancaster, provided my dear lady had no child ; — she produced a son.”

“ Who,” said the trembling abbess, “ is dead.” “ No,” returned Beatrice ;

“ I kept him from destruction, snatched him from the power of his murderous father, and will place him in his mother’s arms. — Surely, I heard a groan.”

“ It is a rough night,” said the abbess, calmly, “ and the wind howls along the cloisters ; but your tale is sufficient to rouse the dead. — Proceed.”

“ His father,” resumed Beatrice, “ attempted to poison his mother, but through my interposition her life was preserved. She has asserted her rights, the King has listened to her complaints, Lancaster is deprived of his matrimonial earldoms, the vizard of the pretended saint has fallen off, and foul disgrace and contumely are his just portion.”

“ Never ! never !” exclaimed the Countess. The abbess rose, and commanded Beatrice to retire, but she remained rooted to the spot, with a countenance pale from horror. Lady Emmeline, putting aside the tapestry, hastened to the support of

the fainting Alicia, now administering powerful stimulants, now endeavouring to inculcate self-command. “Be but firm,” whispered she, “and the base impostor will be detected.” Beatrice heard what passed. Steeped to the lips in guilt, and long accustomed to those fears and surprizals, which, while they punish iniquity, render it expert in its doublings; the moment that artful woman had overcome her first alarm, at supposing that the voice of her lady was an unearthly sound, she saw the course that must be adopted, and pursued it with that determined effrontery of falshood, on which its success depended.

Alicia raised her head from the bosom of the abbess, and met the eyes of her faithless attendant, who audaciously followed Lady Emmeline. Her abhorrence of Surrey’s detested agent gave a new impetus to her feelings, and, addressing her with dignity, she said, “Dare not, Bea-

trice, to slander my reputation, or the honoured name of thy lord, nor deceive this holy abbess with thy idle fabrications. The time that I have been separated from my husband has been passed in captivity, or within these walls. I have made no appeal to the King. The secret of my existence is known to few, and it shall sooner go undiscovered to my grave, than injure the Earl of Lancaster."

"Blessed Virgin," said Beatrice, crossing herself, "hast thou worked another miracle? Could I have expected to find out a sorceress and a prostitute, the paramour of free-booters and the hireling of Satan, among the penitents of Kirklee? But thou, who couldst bring the wicked Countess of Anjou to mass, and then, forcing her body through a pane of glass on which thy image was painted, shiver it to atoms, so that not a dust of it was ever after seen, wilt, unless this witch is thy convert, preserve the Coun-

tess of Lancaster from her spells and incantations."

" I command thee silence," said Alicia. Beatrice dipped her hand in the holy water which stood against the abbess's state-canopy, and, sprinkling herself with the mummeries used to counteract magic, exclaimed, " Avaunt Agatha ; trouble me not !" A thunderbolt could not more have astounded Alicia, than to be accosted as that horrible woman. Her hands vehemently clasped her forehead, as she started back, fixed her imploring eyes on the abbess, and sunk upon her knees. " Innocence shall not be thus overwhelmed," said that calm and faithful friend, giving a signal, which summoned her attendants. They came instantly, and she commanded them to seize that impostor. " What impostor ?" In the audience-chamber there were only herself, and the terrified Alicia. Beatrice was fled. " Prevent the escape of her suite," was the next order. Alas ! how could that be

obeyed. A community of feeble nuns, and the few aged labourers they employed, could not restrain the flight of armed men, mounted on swift horses. While they debated who should venture through the cloisters to tell the porter to defend the gate leading to the outer dormitory, where the troopers lodged, they had forced the keys from the terrified warder, caparisoned their horses, mounted Beatrice, and scoured across the country in the direction toward Sandal castle.

Alicia had now ample cause to regret her want of fortitude and self-controul, which prevented the full disclosure which the abbess had hoped to procure; but Beatrice had touched the master-spring which made most harmony or discord in her soul, by impeaching the honour and threatening the life of her husband. From all that passed, it was evident that a foul conspiracy existed to defame and injure Lancaster. Her acknowledged likeness to Agatha occurred to her recollection, not

as an excuse for Beatrice's misrepresentations, but as a reason to suspect the part which that dauntless and abandoned woman was now acting. Of her existence and residence in that neighbourhood, she had some few months before a dreadful proof. Who was it that now assumed her name, accused Lancaster to the King, demanded her inheritance, and to whom was the child going to be conveyed? These were all questions, which, but for her precipitate agony, might have been fully answered, though suspicion pointed that the curse which denounced her to be the victim of conjugal and maternal anguish, was now accomplishing by the wretch who uttered the malediction.

Lady Emmeline was not one of those every-day friends, who embitter grief by uttering fruitless reproaches, and afflict the self-accusing sufferer by repeating neglected admonitions. She encouraged Alicia to the exertion which her situation required, by observing that the fortitude

which can endure a long course of adversity with meekness, greatly differs from that presence of mind which adapts itself to every emergency, and eludes sudden surprizes. Every observation which she had made on Alicia, convinced her, that, with an acuteness of feeling, rarely equalled, she had much mental energy, provided the spring were touched which would put it in motion. The delicate, irritable being, who, by the influence of luxurious prosperity, bowed beneath a summer evening's breeze, preserved her nuptial faith unstained amid the seductions and the terrors of Surrey's castle ; till, braving fatigue and danger, she projected and executed her escape. The motive, then, was a hope to be restored to her family, and till it died away at the intelligence of the loss of her child, and of her lord's second contract, she did not sink into the inactivity of despair. A superior impulse now required her to re-appear in the world ; namely, to detect an impostor,

recover her child, preserve the reputation of her husband, and rescue him from the machinations of a cabal, who endeavoured to make her misfortunes a pretext for his ruin. When Lady Emmeline recollected Alicia's generous anxiety to keep Lancaster unhurt, even when sustaining the bitterest provocations; the ingenuousness with which she arraigned her own levities, and finally resolved to die to the world, that he might live pure in fame and high in station; she was convinced, this weeping, self-accusing penitent could not be deficient in the true characteristics of female heroism, if called upon to act decidedly in the defence of those, whose life and peace were dearer than her own. She saw with pleasure, but without surprize, that the detection of Father Nicholas's mistake, (who, seeing a nuptial preparation at Kenilworth, concluded Lancaster was the bridegroom,) had relieved Alicia's heart of its only insupportable burden; and those

symptoms of a strong indelible attachment determined Lady Emmeline, that the novice's call to a monastic life was superseded by the circumstance that her marriage-contract continued in full force ; and how slightly soever she might now value her rich inheritance, her family had a claim on her exertions, to detect fraud, disprove calumny, and unmask imposture.

While the abbess was ruminating on what course prudence dictated at the present emergency, a mendicant friar arrived at the gate. He solicited alms for the sufferers from the last Scottish inroad, and received liberally from the nun who acted as almoner. “ The souls of those whom you cherished on earth shall greet your arrival in paradise, worthy virgin,” said the Franciscan, “ while the rich Dives of Pontefract howls in torment !” The chaste votaresses who inhabited convents, were not so totally dissimilar from their sisters of the coteries of our times, as to be

wholly indifferent to the proceedings of the world they had renounced. Slander, or, more properly, gossip had its charms; and the actions of the Lady Baroness furnished conversation for the neighbourhood. The rule of Kirklee was not so severe as to proscribe conversation, and sister Ursula detailed all she had gathered from the indignant mendicant, when the society next assembled. Pontefract castle, she said, had been re-edified, and made the residence of a splendid establishment; but the poor must not expect food, nor the traveller largesses. The reason given was, that the Earl of Lancaster withheld his consort's rights; but very strange tales were told of that lady. The old servants who were driven out when the Scots pillaged the castle, in vain solicited a re-establishment. They could not even get admittance to their mistress's presence, and were now begging the country, and vehemently complaining of ill-usage. The Countess herself, too, (to her shame be it

spoken!) first came down into those parts with the Lord Surrey, who called himself her champion, and even threatened to take arms in defence of her rights. Many said that he would marry her as soon as she was divorced from Lord Lancaster, but others whispered that they knew each other's worthlessness too well, and that a new man, a person of base extraction, whom the King had knighted to please the Countess, was the reigning favourite. Be that as it would, the country-people were all in despair. The turrets of Pontefract, they said, used to shine like a beacon, pointing out a happy harbour to all who could escape the rocks of Sandal. Now tyrant would confront tyrant, and from their combined influence how could the poor, the feeble, and the friendless escape. The sisterhood crossed themselves, and rejoiced at their manumission from such a world.

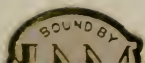
When Lady Emmeline heard that the Earl of Surrey stood at the head of this

formidable combination, she immediately apprehended that measures would be taken to force from her protection the only person who could dissolve it, and with the deepest regret she pointed out to Alicia the necessity of seeking some other abode. Two asylums were offered to her choice; Kenilworth, provided either of the illustrious brothers were there; or Amesbury, the retreat of her mother. At either place her identity would be ascertained, and nothing else seemed necessary to disperse the strange-phenomenon of this pseudo-Countess, whose actions announced her origin, first by her baseness, and next by her evident apprehension of detection.

No time was to be lost; the few vassals Kirklee could muster would add nothing to Alicia's security against a baron so potent and determined as Surrey. She must depend on speed and privacy for her escape. The sumpter-mule of the convent for her palfrey, and Father Nicholas for her escort, were all the abbess could

offer, and these the Countess gratefully accepted. The terror of falling again into the power of Surrey, the vindictive resolute Surrey, now rendered a thousand times more tremendous, by her steady resistance to his will, absorbed every other fear. She was speedily equipped for flight, and in the silence of the night, with no other participator in her design than the abbess, and no other associates than the good old monk and an approving conscience, she bade an affectionately mournful adieu to the happy retreat of Kirklee, and once again embarked on this world's tempestuous sea, a timid yet determined pilgrim, to seek and save her husband.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.



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